

WALL HAUL

Now on display at the Onondaga Historical Association, *Syracuse Cultural Workers: 100 @ 30* works on several levels. It celebrates SCW's 30-year history and its portfolio of more than 700 posters, 100 of which appear in the show. It documents the range of issues addressed in the posters: peace and war, civil rights, empowering women, global warming and other environmental concerns, all encompassing the broad mission of building community. And the show delves into SCW's visual idiom, demonstrating there's no prototype for the designs.



Hang time: Among the 100 Syracuse Cultural Workers posters on display through Jan. 20 at the Onondaga Historical Association are ones devoted to Frederick Douglass and community building.

Indeed, the exhibit includes works like "Guardians," with its pairing of a Diane Ackerman poem with Anita Altman's image of four figures. The quartet, depicted by red, blue and purple, exists outside time or geography. They embody an ideal, a call for ethical living. In a similar vein, Bonnie Acker's "Gathering" portrays groups of human figures on islands and straining to reach out to each other. The work acknowledges divisions among people but suggests it's possible to transcend those divisions.

Other posters have a specific historical or cultural focus. "1961 Freedom Riders-50th Anniversary," drawn from Eric Etheridge's book, *Breach of Peace* (Atlas Publishing reissue), commemorates several hundred civil rights protesters who continued traveling through the South even after threats, beatings and the firebombing of their bus. A display of mug shots references their arrest in Mississippi and imprisonment in a notorious state prison.

"Rachel Carson," meanwhile, has two major components: a quote from the author of *Silent Spring* (Houghton-Mifflin, 1962), a book that helped to jump-start the modern environmental movement in the United States; and an Erica Felder chalk pastel depicting a group of crows in a field. Carson's book dealt specifically with DDT's devastating impact on birds.

That work, among others, points to a basic dynamic of creating posters: striking a balance between text and images. "Rosa Parks," for example, combines Jude Sparks' collage portraying the civil-rights pioneer and a powerful quote from Parks: "I wanted to be treated like a human being." In another poster, the words of Albert Camus, an influential French writer, philosopher and commentator, are placed up front. He said, "I would like to be able to love my country and still love justice." In the background, there's an image of an American flag.

Elsewhere, the show touches on SCW's long history of taking a concept all the way from idea to print.

"Babies," a well-done poster, merges Jan Phillips' images of five infants from the Syracuse area and Kurt Vonnegut's words directed to our youngest citizens. "How to Build Community," a poster combining Karen Kerney's watercolor and Dik Cool's concept, is the Cultural Workers' version of a bestseller, with 40,000 in print and

translations into five languages. The poster presents a city scene with large gardens amid the buildings. There's a long list of community-building imperatives such as "use your library" and "turn off your TV."

Several posters detail connections to local organizations and groups. "Label Jars, Not People," a stark poster which places those words inside a jar outline, was developed in conjunction with the Center on Human Policy. That group, based at Syracuse University, has long advocated for the rights of people who are described as handicapped or disabled.

"Greetings & Thanks to the Natural World" employs text inspired by the Onondaga Nation Thanksgiving Address. Rooted in oral tradition, the address offers a message of gratitude. In that instance, the Cultural Workers worked with Haudenosaunee speakers who translated the address into English.

Although the exhibit clearly functions as a retrospective, it also looks to the present by displaying posters released during 2012. "Frederick Douglass: Power Concedes Nothing" integrates Theresa Florack's design, a large image of the prominent abolitionist and his words. Douglass said bluntly that progress never comes without struggle. A second 2012 poster, "An Elders' Pledge," blends Orrin Onken's text and Deidre Scherer's portrayal of several elders. Scherer is a fiber artist whose work depicts elders with compassion and empathy; she has long emphasized that aging is a highly individualized process.

Finally, the exhibition celebrates the Cultural Workers' continuing creation of posters, the annual Peace Calendar and other items which are distributed both locally and around the country. During the past 30 years, the organization has dealt with financial crises including reduced sales during recessions. Yet it's both survived and remained true to its original mission. The OHA show provides a very public birthday party.

Syracuse Cultural Workers: 100 @ 30, is on display through Jan. 20 at the Onondaga Historical Association, 321 Montgomery St. It's open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call 428-1864.

