

https://www.eagletribune.com/news/lifestyles/freemans-art-encompasses-struggle-in-brooks-exhibit/article_560c1e0c-af01-11ee-9f8a-b3d3c669815a.html

EDITOR'S PICK

Freeman's art encompasses 'struggle' in Brooks exhibit

By Monica Sager | msager@eagletribune.com

Jan 13, 2024



While showing his work at the Brooks School, Freeman is also working as a visiting teacher during the winter term.
Courtesy photo

[f](#) [in](#) [p](#) [@](#)



NORTH ANDOVER — Robert Freeman's "Struggle" is an oil on canvas painting done to honor the Black history in the United States, while providing a sense of power, hardship and fight among the cubism-like image of bodies tackling each other.

The art is just one of Freeman's explorations into the theme of "racial reckoning" within the country, as he called it.

Freeman's work is on display at the Brooks School, at 1160 Great Pond Road, through Saturday, Feb. 17. This marks the second time Freeman showed his work in North Andover.

"On the third anniversary of the Capitol insurrection, my paintings represent the division that continues to rip at our nation's seams," Freeman said. "Releasing my feelings — anger, outrage and sadness — has resulted in these canvases."

Freeman's work called "Struggle" is a portrayal of his vast emotional frustrations. He said the paintings can serve as a "visual metaphor of adults playing children's games."

"These paintings represent the struggle for the soul of our nation," he said.

Majority of Freeman's paintings have to do with satire or poignant social issues. His work has been shown nationally for over 40 years. He has been included in collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, the National Center for African American Artists and the DeCordova Museum.

Freeman's work is known for his use of vivid and powerful figures. He traditionally focuses on interactions between people.

The work displayed at the Brooks School takes a detailed look at the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, as they exemplify what it is like to live in the country as a person of color. Freeman also said he looked into the Jan. 6 insurrection, when "the world observed how divisive and violent our racial politics are."

"They're hard paintings to digest, but they're important to get out there as an artist," Freeman said.

Freeman said his art comes from frustration he felt around the “police brutality that had never been seen before.”

“We’d never seen something like this before,” Freeman said. “The work is really about the division of American politics.”

Freeman’s work falls into the Brooks School’s mission to not be limited in what students experience and learn, according to Babs Wheelden, arts department head. Since starting in her position in 2019, Wheelden has made it her goal to “make everything mission aligned.”

“This school’s mission is to make the most meaningful educational experience of our students’ lives, and I throw in artistic as well,” Wheelden said. “This year, my theme behind the work is I wanted every artist that I was interested in bringing to the school to be relatable to the students and connect with the idea of empathy.”

Wheelden said this show intentionally follows though themes.

”Babs shares the credit for showing very difficult work,” Freeman said.

While showing his work at the Brooks School, Freeman is also serving as a visiting teacher during the winter term. Students are doing a deeper dive into one subject area, according to Wheelden.

Freeman previously served as the art director at the Weston Public Schools in the 1970s. He went on to lecture at Harvard University on painting and drawing, and he was an artist-in-residence at Noble and Greenough in Dedham for almost 20 years.

“My favorite grade to teach is grades one through three. They don’t know they’re not artists, and they really are,” Freeman said. “I didn’t think I would miss the young voices and the young thinking and the young feelings. It’s wonderful to get back and talk to the students because they inspire me.”

The group with Freeman is doing a focus on Italian art and culture.

”His work talks about social justice,” Wheelden said. “I want the students in this class to learn how to make works of art that are meaningful because of where they’re painting from but also to create works of art that share a perspective.”

The students’ work will be hung alongside Freeman’s at the end of the course, according to Wheelden.

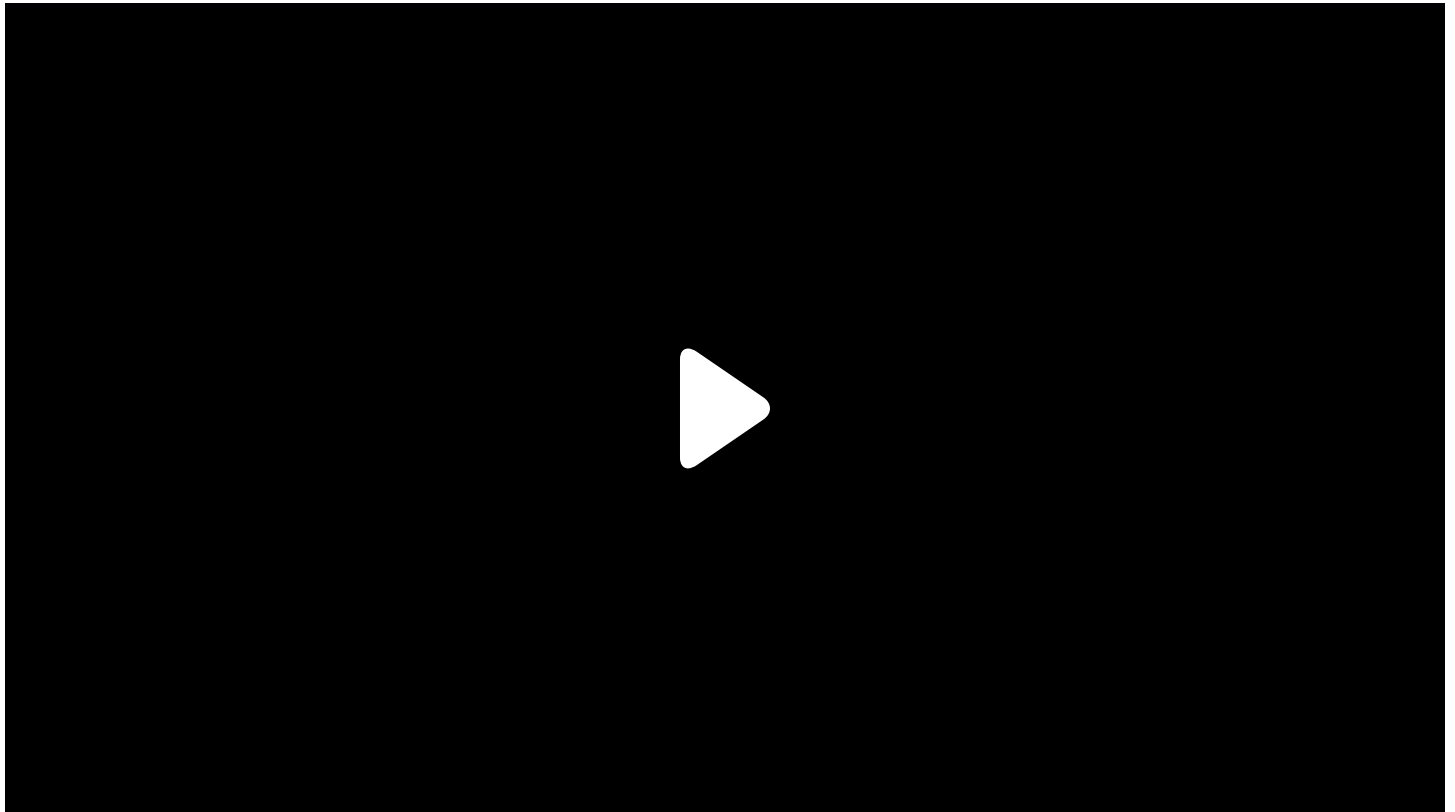
People visiting the exhibit will also be able to fill out a card in response to prompts about struggle and fight, as they review Freeman’s work.

”The struggles that are depicted in these paintings are not new but they’re different but they’re also repetitive,” Wheelden said.

Follow Monica on Twitter at [@MonicaSager3](#)

Follow Monica on Twitter at [@MonicaSager3](#)

Trending Video



Loading...

**Saint Michael School
Open House**
Saint Michael School

**MA Home Energy
Assistance (LIHEAP)...**
Haverhill

**MA Home Energy
Assistance (LIHEAP)...**
North Andover, MA

**(Women's Basketball)
University of...**
North Essex Community...

**MA Home
Assistance**
Andover



Monica Sager

