

Arts

Marietta Square Art Exhibit Takes a Look at Human Trafficking

The artists and organizers of the "Dolls in the City" exhibit hope to raise awareness that the problem is close to home, even in the suburbs.

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Hundreds of people passed by the dolls in the window display at the 2 Rules Fine Art gallery in Marietta during the May Art Walk. The soft fabric dolls with cute faces sat silently in the window in front of a large "Dolls in the City" show banner.

Then, most of the passing people did a double-take when they saw what the signs around the dolls' necks said. The signs forewarn of what happens to innocent victims of sex trafficking. The display is meant to be a wake-up call.

According to the [Governor's Office for Children and Families \(GOCF\)](#), approximately 300 to 500 girls are commercially sexually exploited throughout Georgia each month.

The FBI ranks Atlanta among the 14 cities in the nation with the highest incidence of child prostitution. The Georgia Bureau of Investigations lists possible reasons for this, including high tourism, a large international airport, numerous interstate connections, and dense populations.

But, the problem is not just deep in the city. A study by the Schapiro Group found that 42 percent of men in the Atlanta area who purchase sex with an underage girl are from the upper north side outside of the perimeter.

The artists and organizers of the "Dolls in the City" exhibit hope to raise awareness that the problem is close to home, even in the suburbs. The art exhibit includes works by members of the Women's Caucus for Art of Georgia. Most of the artworks were created specifically for the show's theme of raising awareness of sex trafficking in Atlanta and the surrounding communities. The dolls in the artworks represent the victims.

A work entitled "Get Involved – Save a Life" by artist Patricia Bohannon, is very colorful, but it includes many disturbing realities of sex trafficking. The painting depicts a brightly painted trunk, complete with trunk latch.

"The trunk represents one of the many ways that victims of trafficking are abused, tortured and terrorized," says Bohannon in her artist's statement. "'Trunking' is a practice of placing the victim in a trunk and leaving him/her there until they are willing to comply with the demands of the trafficker or pimp... The currency and green paper clay faces represent the 'prices' placed upon the 'priceless' lives of innocent victims in an industry that only recognizes their worth as sexual commodities."

Another piece, a collage entitled "City Traffic" by artist Kathy Meliopoulos, shows young paper doll girls in various states of undress, their identities protected somewhat with black bars across the eyes, breasts and vaginas. Map strips across the artwork represent a city map of streets interspersed with yellow caution strips.

"I wanted to juxtapose the innocence of young girls represented by paper dolls, with the harsh reality of their exploitation for monetary gain and enslavement," says Meliopoulos in her artist's statement.

A wall just inside the gallery is covered with news stories about sex trafficking in and around Atlanta, as well as educational posters and crime statistics about sex trafficking.

Posters warn teens about dangerous activities like "friending" unknown persons on facebook or going to parties held by someone they or their families don't know.

Information is posted about local organizations that are available to help victims of sex trafficking, such as [Wellspring Living](#), [Street Grace](#) and [youthSpark](#). Also posted is the new "tip line" for the "[Georgia's Not Buying It](#)," campaign that has been set up to report suspicions of sex trafficking activity or victims. That number is 888-373-7888.

Artists showing in the exhibit are Vicki Bethel, Fennel Blythe, Patricia Bohannon, Amandine Drouet, Mary Frances, Lucy Hale, Beverly Harding, Corlia Kock, Linda McCune, Kathy Meliopoulos, Loretta Paraguassu, Marlene Puca, Cherie Redlinger, Flora Rosefsky, Gerry Sattelle, Debbie Smith, Douglas Thayer, Audrey Troceen, Lisa Tuttle, Mona Waterhouse, Charlie Watts, and Patty Weisman.

The "Dolls in the City" exhibit runs through June 29.

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