

## In MOCAD fall exhibitions, Mark Thomas Gibson stands apart 'A Retelling' is on display until February 4

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Mark Thomas Gibson's *Town Crier* has something to tell us.

"Hear Ye, Hear Ye," the character starts in every drawing before yelling a mess of headlines that would be obscene if they weren't real. Or, perhaps, the fact that they're based on real events makes them even more obscene.

"White nationalists marched in Philadelphia streets last night! Happy Fourth of July! 11 armed Moorish Americans were arrested without firing one shot... progress! Critical race theory is being banned in schools because it makes some white people feel bad! I never knew this was about feelings," he yells in one panel. "In the south, they say 'bless your heart' when they really mean f\*ck off! So for Texas, Clarence Thomas, Amy Coney Barrett, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, and Brett Kavanaugh bless your hearts!" he says to the Supreme Court Justices in another.

Gibson's "Town Crier" series anchors his *A Retelling* exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. It's part of MOCAD's recently opened Fall-Winter exhibition lineup alongside work by Kesswa, Kevin Bernard Moultrie Daye (aka Spirituals), and a collection of archival materials that celebrate past exhibitions across MOCAD's 17-year history.

Kesswa presents a sound installation and two "immersive" API experiences via QR codes that left us asking, "Is that it?" We can't exactly figure out what's going on in Kevin Bernard Moultrie Daye's exhibit, but during the opening reception, he ran around the museum, babbling nonsensically while a videographer followed him. He gave us a tiny cup of water and said "This is generational wealth. Hold on to it, and one day it will become valuable."

Gibson's show stands out among the underwhelming lineup, mostly for his *Town Crier* character. He's meant to be a play on a 19th-century anchorman who is seen as a public authority figure. He's a modern-day version of the newsboys who used to stand on the corner and yell "extra, extra!" before telling the whole neighborhood the latest headlines. Except modern-day news gets more bizarre and shameful as the years creep on.



For this series, Gibson appropriated real headlines from various news sources and added his own commentary to make fun of the way information is produced and passed on from news sources. It's a retelling of the news cycle with

the “what the hell is going on around here” that we’re all thinking when it comes to things like critical race theory, police brutality against unarmed Black men, climate change, and the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*.

“Jeff Bezos floats in space while the weight of the world is on warehouse workers! Germany has been hit with deadly floods! Oregon’s streets buckle from the heat wave! The Cleveland Indians are now the Cleveland Guardians! Hell freezes over!” he says wearing the same pair of breeches and long coat in every drawing.

Although he once appears as the Grim Reaper and proclaims “Ketanji Brown Jackson is sworn in as a Supreme Court Justice while the Supreme Court sides with climate change apocalypse over EPA! Six people should not be able to damn the entire world!”

A few other paintings outside the Town Crier series present a mess of limbs as the clash of ideas and struggle to make sense of it all in our current political landscape. His painting, “Suspension of Disbelief” tackles the Jan. 6 riot on the Capitol by showing a Black janitor cleaning the mess left by the predominantly white mob. It shows the racial disparity in “access to constitutional rights and law enforcement” because we know good and damn well that if Black people stormed the Capitol, they would have been met with extreme police presence and violence.

Imagine looking at a history book or newspaper archives and seeing Gibson’s work instead. That would be an appropriate retelling of history.

