

**VISUAL ARTS**

## Tang exhibit showcases symbols of activism

*Student curates display focusing on visual elements of movements*

**By Shrishti Mathew**

Last summer, as Jane Cole sat in protest against the murder of George Floyd, she noticed something. The protest she was attending in Saratoga Springs, where she lived, had a number of powerful visual elements. Symbols painted on signboards that asserted identity, pride, power and demanded justice. It sparked a need to find out more within her and expressing herself in the way she knew best, Cole, an art history major at Skidmore College and the Carol Marschand endowment intern at the Tang Teaching Museum organized and curated “Enlivened, Aware, Awake: Symbols of Activism.”

“I found that the movement seemed to be really anchored around visuals,” she said. “So, whether that was photographs or infographics shared online, it seemed like people were really interested in sharing visuals of the protests.”

She said she started out exploring the visual and material



**COLE**

culture of protests and social justice in the United States, then narrowing it down to the concept of exploring three specific visual symbols of activism, with the Black Power fist, the Pride rainbow flag, and the Wide Awake Eye, which was conceptualized by an artist collective called the Wide Awake. The work displayed illustrate the adoption of these three symbols, historically and in the present. The exhibition features photographs, posters, artwork and other paraphernalia from protests. Each exhibit includes an explanation written by Cole talking about its origin and significance.

Cole took the name of the concept from a quote by Wide Awake’s founding member Rujeko Hockley, who said that in occasional moments of joy found during the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent period of intense sociopolitical polarization, she was able to feel “enlivened, aware, awake.”

Cole said she also used the exhibition to inform herself

better, as a protestor and a citizen.

“I have been involved in and interested in social justice for a while and am also a political science minor,” Cole said. “but I didn’t know the specific histories of these three symbols before putting the show together. So through the Tang collection, which I was able to look through in preparation for my exhibition, I learned a lot about the history of Black power and the Black Power Fist through the Tang Black Panther Party archive. That provided a great opportunity for me to do research into the history of Black power.”

“And same with the Rainbow flags. I learned that the contemporary or modern mass-produced version of the rainbow flag only has six colors, for example, but when it was designed in 1978, by Gilbert Baker, it actually had eight colors. And we were able to acquire an original eight color flag that was made in 2003 — for a pride parade in Key West, Fla. — for the collection and also to be exhibited in the show.”

This is Cole’s senior capstone project and is supported by Friends of the Tang and the Carter-Rodriguez Fund for Stu-



An original eight-color Pride flag, designed in 1978 by Gilbert Baker, is part of “Enlivened, Aware, Awake: Symbols of Activism” at Tang Teaching Museum.

dent-Curated Programs. It is on display until April 11 and is available on the Tang museum website.