

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Courtroom Artist's View of Heroism in Action

With Full Access to Ground Zero Site, a 'Historical Volunteer' Captures in Pen and Ink the Energy and Emotion of Responders

By Pia Carron

During the spring that followed the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, courtroom artist Aggie Kenny decided to take her sketchbook to the site of the World Trade Center. With a credential from the Salvation Army—one that declared her a "historical volunteer"—she had full access to the site between March and May 2002. During that time, she traveled in daily from her home in Suffolk County.

What resulted were real-time pen-and-ink sketches of police, firefighters and clean-up crews that capture the energy, emotion and spirit of the moment. Now, the New York City Police Museum has assembled more than 25 of the works for the exhibit "Artist as Witness: The 9/11 Responders," on display starting Sept. 7 and until January.

"This is a beautiful tribute to the heroic and exhausting work done by the responders," said the museum's executive director, Julie Bose. "I have never seen views like this before."

Ms. Kenny's sketches capture the scope of the cleanup operation in several ways, from the number of people involved to the vast scale of the site. Pointing to a painting of workers with rakes and massive machines near the pit, she took care to highlight the date: May 6, 2002. "It was May, and they were still raking assiduously for any human remains left," she said.

The exhaustion of the workers is another key theme. Several paintings capture uniformed men asleep on cots. Others depict individuals lined up or seated for meals.

For one painting, Ms. Kenny joined a group of men eating and giving each other nicknames, which she wrote at the bottom of the page. "As a courtroom artist, you try to stay in the background, but they were inviting me in," she said.



Aggie Kenny sketched clean-up crews at the World Trade Center site between March and May 2002. An exhibit of her paintings will be at the Police Museum until January.

Even though that particular picture is a scene of masculinity, it includes several little red hearts floating above—and not because it was a romantic moment.

"They were cutout hearts from schoolchildren. The place was plastered with art, quilts

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and things from well-wishers all over the world," she said.

The variety of tributes is also represented by her sketch of the carpenters' memorial.

"It was a poignant memorial because at the top were 18 hardhats representing the 18 carpenters

who died on Sept. 11," she said.

Ms. Kenny didn't take photographs of the site, but instead sketched everything with the speed and detail that she uses in her courtroom work.

"I wanted the sketches to be as authentic as possible. I did not want to shoot photos or paint while I was there," she said, adding that sketching allowed her to capture on paper what she saw with a sense of immediacy.

When she reached a point that felt complete, Ms. Kenny simply boxed up her work and put it away. "I never gave it a thought," she said. "They were sitting for eight years in the garage."

The work came to the attention of the Police Museum after Ms. Bose organized an exhibit of courtroom sketches that featured Ms. Kenny's work. After

seeing the Sept. 11 sketches, Ms. Bose suggested a show at the museum and Ms. Kenny began filling in her drawings with watercolor. Curator Joshua Ruff collaborated in selecting works to emphasize the specific themes of work and repose.

Ms. Kenny's pictures have surfaced at a time when members of New York's congressional delegation are pushing for legislation that would provide health care to those suffering from illnesses related to the attack and aftermath. Reps. Carolyn Maloney, Jerrold Nadler and Peter King are co-sponsoring the James Zadroga 9/11 Health Compensation Act; Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand introduced the Senate version of the bill, of which Sen. Charles Schumer is a co-sponsor.

"Aggie Kenny's evocative works remind us, during this moment of reflection, of the intense sacrifice of the 9/11 first



responders and the unfathomable adversity they experienced in their work on the pile," Mr. Nadler said in a statement. "These artworks create a vivid portrait of heroism and bravery, and are a concrete reminder of why we must pass our legisla-

tion to provide critical health care and compensation for the responders and survivors of 9/11."

Mr. Nadler and Ms. Maloney are expected to attend the Tuesday night opening reception for Ms. Kenny's work.