

U.S.S. Indianapolis remembered through artwork

by Dan Grossman

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Simona Frillici in front of her artwork at the Spacecamp Microgallery. *Dan Grossman*

On July 30, 1945 the U.S.S. Indianapolis was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and sank. The sinking is the subject of Italian artist Simona Frillici's site-specific installation, *July 30, 1945*, at [SpaceCamp Microgallery](#), which opened for May's First Friday and can be viewed by appointment through the month.

"I saw the open call on the web to do a site-specific installation," Frillici told me Friday night. "When I saw the perimeter of the gallery it seemed to me like a big fish. And the big fish made me think of the [U.S.S. Indianapolis](#). So I made a link between the name of the city and the story about this ship. And so I thought up an installation about the story of this ship, U.S.S. Indianapolis. And the fact that nine hundred men were abandoned in the ocean for three days and three nights."

These 900 men battled exposure, shark attacks, and dehydration in the open water. Only 300 survived.

Frillici covered an entire wall of the tiny gallery space with copies of photographs of U.S.S. Indianapolis sailors and the ship itself. She then splashed the images with blue paint. And on top of these painted photographs, Frillici projected the video image of open water.

The water filmed in the projection is not the Pacific Ocean – where the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis took place – but the Mediterranean Sea, which is much closer to Frillici's home province of [Perugia, in Italy](#). (Frillici was born in Foligno, Italy in 1966.) There is also an audio component to the installation, featuring the U.S. National Anthem and the sound of lapping waves.

It was in the Mediterranean that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. I asked Frillici if her installation drew any inspiration from the biblical story that centers on the themes of man's obedience (and disobedience) to God.

"Yes, Frillici said, "But also *Pinocchio*. This is a classic of literature that every Italian schoolchild reads."

In *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi, Pinocchio finds his father in the belly of a great whale. They build a fire in the whale's belly which causes the whale to sneeze, expelling them both back into open water.

Among the Xeroxes, showing both survivors and victims of the sinking, is a Xeroxed photograph of Frillici herself. This is Frillici's way, as an artist, of relating to the tragedy of the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis, which she sees as a metaphor for the human condition, she told me.

"The sharks surrounded the sailors for three days and three nights," says Frillici. "And then the shark took the men and killed them. It reminded me of my interest in human beings. So the man is like in a big ocean, in the darkness, unknown. And then fate decides to take the man."

July 30, 1945 is SpaceCamp MicroGallery's last installation before it closes for good. Flounder Lee, with the aid of several co-gallerists (including NUVO contributor [Charles Fox](#)), has filled the small gallery space with conceptually large shows since 2010.

But perhaps this closing is simply making way for another new and exciting gallery yet to open. In any case, Frillici was impressed by her time in the city.

"I always try to find places far from where I live and Indianapolis is very far," she told me. "I'm impressed with this city. There are a lot of young people. A lot of creative people. And new restaurants. New situations. "

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