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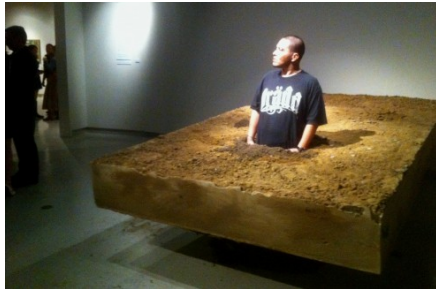
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January 25, 2013

Wow, what an opening

You know there's excitement ahead at a **Fresno Art Museum** (<http://fresnoartmuseum.org/>) opening when you have to drive WAY down the block to find a parking place. I'd never seen so many people at an opening as for last night's "Breakthrough." I heard through the grapevine that as many as 600 people (**update**: final count was more than 750) crowded in for this exhibition devoted to six promising artists with Fresno connections. And many looked to be in their 20s and 30s, exactly the demographic the museum needs to keep the momentum going.



One of the highlights was Caleb Duarte's installation piece, a work loaded with meaning. For the show, Duarte recreated a performance art piece he originally made in a small village outside Chiapas, Mexico, that involved the villagers burying him and his partner, Mia, up to the head in a shallow, hand-dug hole in the dirt. For the museum version, Duarte created a 12-by-6 foot slab of "dirt" (made of concrete and soil) that seems to float out from the wall. There's a hole for a person to stand in the middle of that slab.

If you go to see the work now, the hole is empty. But at the reception, a local artist, Arturo Villanueva, stood there for hours, virtually immobile. (You'll be able to watch a video of the performance.) As Duarte explained to me, "I wanted to show the body in resistance against architectural tensions as a reflection to a breaking point that society will have to soon confront."

There was also a component of Duarte's work outside the museum: a group of local farmworkers digging a hole, which got a lot of people at the reception talking. At its heart, Duarte wants to get people thinking about the "system" — meaning all of us as connected inhabitants of a finite Earth — and how that relates to the social and economic order, including the role of indigenous peoples. I go into a little more detail about the work in my upcoming Sunday Spotlight column about the overall exhibition, and I plan to get into more detail about Duarte and his project in a further column just about him. (There's a lot of meaning there to unpack.)

Another highlight of the opening was getting a chance to meet with one of Duarte's friends, the eminent artist Emory Douglas, who has a place in art history for his role as the longtime Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party. His graphic art was featured in most issues of the The Black Panther newspaper. Now he spends his time traveling the world, giving lectures and participating in museum retrospectives of his work.

Douglas has a special interest in indigenous cultures, which is how he connected with Duarte. (Douglas has visited the experimental art space in Chiapas that Duarte co-founded.) He showed me the "initiation" tattoo on his arm given to him by the Maori when he visited New Zealand. Here's a photo of Douglas and Fresno Art Museum director Linda Cano at the opening:

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Stephen (<http://fresnobeehive.com/?p=15759#comment-135384>) : I love it when music moves you to a higher level of writing. It helps us to feel a bit of what you felt. I also high...

Donald Munro (<http://fresnobeehive.com/?p=15722#comment-134845>) : Interesting perspective, Heather. Sometimes I wonder if the novelty of being able to constantly update the world will ev...

pk (<http://fresnobeehive.com/?p=15722#comment-134579>) : Remember the 'ugly american' tourist types that would go on vacation and take endless photos, 'super 8' movies and later...



Other fun stuff: I got to talk some more last night with “Breakthrough” artists Julia Woli Scott, Nigel Robertson and Terrance Reimer, who all were understandably enthused about the turnout. (Somehow I missed Leslie Batty and Laura Goldstone, who were lost in the crush.) Here I am with Terrance in the midst of his gorgeously “mounted” photographs:



The white matte effect, an homage to earlier mounting techniques, is actually all one seamless image, and it's quite beautiful. That isn't to detract from the actual content of Reimer's photos, which offer a distinctive perspective on everyday life in the Valley. Notice how there are very few faces in his photos; he purposefully crops them out in interesting ways or shows heads from behind. The result: the viewer is forced in a way to break out of the default we have as humans of always fixating on the face. Instead, our focus is shifted to such things as gesture, form and detail, as in the following fascinating image of pop-culture kitsch:



You can tell I had a great time last night and how enthusiastic about this show I am. My Sunday stories haven't been posted yet, but you can check out the [photo gallery for the show](http://bit.ly/14e1OsC) (<http://bit.ly/14e1OsC>) we've put up on fresnobee.com.

dmunro@fresnobee.com (<mailto:dmunro@fresnobee.com?subject=Wow, what an opening>)

[Heather P \(http://fresnobeehive.com/?p=15722#comment-134316\)](http://fresnobeehive.com/?p=15722#comment-134316) : It is fascinating that this is seeping into so many other areas of art and culture. In the theater, we are constant...

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Responses to "Wow, what an opening"

Janet Heidinger says:

January 25, 2013 at 8:46 pm (<http://fresnobeehive.com/archives/15705#comment-133855>)

Donald-such a beautifully written review on this opening. You inspired me to go check it out...can't wait to be inspired. You rock, always.

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