

State of the Art/Art of the State

On view at the [Cameron Art Museum](#) in Wilmington NC until October, 30th, 2011.

This contemporary art exhibition is displaying work by artists currently living in, or native to, the state of North Carolina. Calls went out over the state for artists to bring a single piece of art to be installed in the museum. Artists had a period of 24 hours in which to deliver work between 5:00 Friday May 6 and 5:00 pm Saturday May 7th. North Carolina's artists responded! Over 800 works of art were eventually hung.

The event pays homage to the open, creative curatorial spirit of the late art world maverick, Walter Hopps (1932-2005). In 1978, responding to a comment from a colleague, Deborah Velders (Jensen) about the problems artists face gaining access to notable curators, Hopps decided to hold an exhibition inviting any artist to bring a single work of art, meet Hopps, and see the installation of their work. This event called "36 Hours" occurred in an alternative space located in downtown Washington, D.C., called Museum of Temporary Art, or MOTA. There was no entry fee, no jurying, no selection or rejection. The only restrictions were the work needed to fit through the door and it had to be delivered within the 36 hours open time span. This unprecedented opportunity for artists attracted over 400 works of art, all by artists living and working in the Washington, D.C. area.

My personal experience at Cameron Art Museum:



Arriving around 1:30 in the afternoon, I thought I'd check out the museum to see the space. It had been threatening to storm during the three hour drive to Wilmington from Hillsborough and of course the downpour started as soon I parked. Thinking I might find a few other artists at the museum, I went inside to get any details about the process of entering my work. I was pleasantly surprised to find a small room filled with about 30 artists. Several people referred to this small room as The Green Room. Most artists had carried their work inside with them. Many were large pieces since the show's size restrictions were basically whatever could fit through the door. Originally, artists were supposed to wait in line outside the museum but due to the storm, that plan was scrapped right away. The museum staff graciously let us stay in the small room until 5:00 pm when the exhibition intake with the curators was to begin.

As more artists continued to arrive, the parking lot filled beyond capacity and the overflow parking areas were rapidly filling up. After a while, people were parking in any space they could find along the roads near the museum.

The Green Room was completely topped out as people lined up in the hallway. The storm poured down fast and furious outside. The museum staff, made up mostly of

volunteers, began to look like deer caught in the headlights. It was still only early afternoon, not even 5:00 yet.

In the Prospectus, it was stated that "First Come, First Serve" basis would be the way that art was entered. A brilliant suggestion from one of the artists in the Green Room early on saved us from total chaos later on, and we began to write our names down on a list to keep track of our order of arrival. I was number 26 and had arrived around 1:30. A short time later, when a friend of mine arrived, she was number 102. We just sat waiting in the Green Room with our various art pieces tucked in every nook and cranny, listening to the rain and making new friends. We waited, most with smiles on our faces since this was an opportunity of a lifetime.

It could not be said that this event was dis-organized, it was *un-organized*. To me, no one ever seemed to be in charge. I was a bit perturbed in the beginning since my core personality is to be highly organized. It was clear to see that so many things could have been so much more efficiently done but I let go of that frustration after seeing how "organically" the process kept unfolding. I don't think that the people who thought up the idea had envisioned such things as a day-long storm, artists arriving really early, or had imagined how many artists and their work would be pouring in. And that was the point of this unprecedented event, opening up the doors, raising the glass ceiling and taking a chance on how many and what kind of contemporary art would represent the state of North Carolina.

So for the next few hours, we waited and waited, talked, dozed and looked at each other's artwork. Then finally, sometime around 5:00, intake began.

From the moment the artists were being processed in the intake area and let into the actual gallery space, there was a new feeling of excitement. A passionate electrical current started vibrating in the air. Museum volunteers were at the tables doing the paperwork, filling out the last level of entry forms, directing, placing and stacking 2D work against the walls for another volunteer to hang. 3D work was carefully placed on counters or other surfaces to be rearranged as more 3D art kept flowing in. There were artists who had never had a piece in any show before while others were well-known or gallery-represented but all of us were equal in the chance to have a piece in the show.

Meanwhile, art was continuously going up on the walls, being placed gently on pedestals or large platforms, hung from the ceiling and all being elegantly squeezed in where it made sense. Sounds like it should have been a big ugly mess but amazingly enough, it all kept fitting in, piece by piece.

I stayed around for some of this process, taking in all the amazing art conceptions, endless array of colors and fascinating images that artists are capable of. Of course, I was also watching to see where my piece would be hung. It is a 7ft tall wall sculpture and when hung, looks as if it is floating from the wall. Not your average "hang a canvas on a nail" approach when hanging my piece! It was put on a thin corner wall by itself. It is a bit hidden so one has to look for it but "Unfolding in the Softness of Night, She Dreams On" fits that just spot fine!

Throughout most of the night, artwork was being added into the grand scheme of the gallery space. I'm not sure if they ever closed down during that time but by the next day, Saturday, at 5:00 pm, they had a final count of 802 pieces of art. Someone told me that

security closed the doors at 5:10 with more artists knocking on the doors asking to be let in while other artists were still driving around the parking lot looking for a space to park. That was sad, but the point was a 24-hour period in which art would be accepted into the show and they had to stop accepting work at 5:00.

The organizers, staff and volunteers kept hanging the show once the doors were officially closed. Artists like myself went to back to hotel rooms, slept, showered, had dinner, then started showing up again around 6:30 to see what this event was finally going to look like. The doors opened a little after 7:00 for the show to begin!

The opening was a ball - like a BIG party. I had lots of fun just walking around, taking photos, talking to total strangers. We were all artist comrades and supporters. It felt like we had "survived" some rite of passage just to get in the show. I loved the sense of non-competition that existed in the gallery. This show is not juried, has no entry fees, neither are there awards, honorable mentions or any other status producing effort. What really matters is that art was hung from the floor to the ceiling showcasing the talent and diversity of North Carolina contemporary artists. Due to the time constraints, organizers didn't have time to put the labels up so no name, title, medium, or other information of the art was seen anywhere. That too was just fine with me. It was as if the individual personal info didn't matter. Collectively, we were what art is about in NC. You can have your opinions about the art - good, bad or in-between but you cannot say we don't exist!

What I also enjoyed is the way all the art "fit" together both physically and visually in the space. Again, truly amazing since there is no theme other than being an NC artist. From floor to ceiling, art was everywhere in every square inch without looking crazy or disjointed.

The atmosphere at most gallery receptions I've had or attended usually have a quiet, calm feeling but a little nervous, like trying to not make noise in the library. You are just supposed to be intellectually absorbed by the creative environment so "please be quiet". This exhibition opening was nothing like that. We were like 5 year olds, running around, giving hugs or high fives to each other, standing in front of our own art having our pictures taken, exclaiming at other artist's work, or looking quite stunned at the overwhelming effort it took to do this astonishing event. Yep, we were having a party! No calm, quiet gallery/museum environment here. Artists were congratulating each other, museum members were wandering around with eyes as big as saucers, being overwhelmed by the colors, images, and meaning of the art, and the organizers were absolutely beaming. Somehow, this amazing process came together like 802 pieces of a giant puzzle; and who knew at the beginning it would make such a grand picture!

Would I do it again? In a heartbeat! Everyone I met was thrilled with the show. I have to say that i don't think it is a good show - *it is an unbelievable show* - especially if you understand how it came to be. Bravo to all the volunteers and staff that did the work. Without them the work would not have been so caringly hung. Bravo to the curators - Susan Davidson, Senior Curator, Collections & Exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Timothy Anglin Burgard, Curator-in-Charge, American Art at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Nicholas Cullinan, Curator of International Modern Art at the Tate Modern, London, and Apsara DiQuinzio, Assistant Curator, Painting and Sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art - who thought of such a wild way to honor Walter Hopps. And Bravo to the artists who took a chance of driving from wherever they call home in NC to show up (even early!) to

be a part of this unique experience.

During the reception, someone said to me, If you love art and you love NC, you got to see this show! I believe that's true - go see the State of the Art/Art of the State