



THE COLBY ECHO

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Artist Peter Soriano on his new Museum installation

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By: Terrence O'Connor on September 24, 2015.

This year the Colby College Museum of Art will be formally opening its doors to the public on Thursday, September 24, 2015, at the annual Fall Open House. A large part of what makes the night so exciting is that it will be the first occasion to view one of the newest additions to the Museum's collection. The artwork in question is a complex new wall installation by renowned contemporary American painter and sculptor Peter Soriano. Having begun the project this past spring, Soriano has been finishing the final stages of the installation process over the course of this past month. The Colby Echo has sat down to talk with Soriano about the new piece, his artistic decisions, and the process of working in conjunction with the Museum.

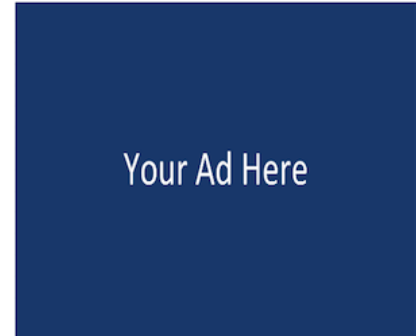
Much of your work depicts something that is less concrete or easy to understand by the untrained eye. What makes these constellations of marks and annotations so attractive to you?



I think that it's the most direct way I can gather and see the information in front of me that interests me as an individual. The walled pieces are not that similar to the drawings I do on paper or on my sketchbooks. I am not interested in depiction per se, – I am interested in seeing relationships and observing how they changed by moving my objects around. It is the most direct way that I look and absorb the world around us. I enjoy drawing, but what interests me the most is the dynamic

that occurs between two objects rather than the depiction of them. I am always measuring: looking at the space between two objects, or their particular proportions; I'm very often moving from one site to another and seeing how the relationships between shapes change. This is the most direct way in which I can talk to myself first on how I comprehend the world; comprehension is what interests me. And, second thing, the vocabulary I used somehow I think tends to be more universal because an arrow is an arrow in no matter which language, a dot is a dot, measurements are measurements and numbers are simply numbers. I think I developed a short hand not only for myself to understand, but for others to understand, too. What interests me in that vocabulary is that it can easily be reproduced by others; in other words, as I think you can understand from my wall piece, I made it with others and in some cases I've barely worked on the walls and in some ways another interaction may occur years from now when I don't even touch it. So in my instructions, why I use an arrow for instance, is because it's universal and anyone can use an arrow as opposed to a sort of a gesture that is strictly understood by very few. So I'm trying to rid myself in the stance of myself.

I personally really enjoy some of the works in which you have used spray paint on paper and watercolor too. I would say they add a surprising touch to your artistry as a whole. Do you enjoy working on paper better, or on a blank wall?



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I certainly have worked on paper more than I have worked on walls. I believe they complement each other I don't think I like one more than the other. I tend to very often draw on paper or work on paper when I'm not working on the wall. For instances, when I'm travelling I work on paper on the room I am staying in. It's a medium that allows me to be more mobile; it allows me to work on smaller scale so that people can enjoy them, and then they're willing to give me their wall. (laughs) So yeah, I love paper and I love the way it works. I particularly like Japanese paper these days; it is the kind that I am using the most. It's tough and then it folds very nicely and so, you know, and I'm allowed to use a bunch of medium on it that I cannot use on my wall.

Something that is very noticeable about your work is the consistent white background in all of your pieces. What compels you to work with this element?

I work with what's there, and so far I've only worked with white, because white is there. I think that the white walls, in some ways, resemble the paper I use. I have exhibited spray paint on brick walls a couple of times, so I'm not against it; it just becomes more difficult to do tight lines on really rough walls. But you are talking about coloring the wall first and I must accept that I have never thought about it; – it could be a good idea.

I am curious to hear how your experience of working at our museum along with our student volunteers has been so far. How was the experience?

I'd say the experience has been great. I have worked with students previously two or three times and no other experience was as intense as the one at Colby. I think it's because I had basically five students coming in and out and because they could not stay the whole time as they had classes; I had to think ahead of time for them. I could basically only spray when the museum was closed, so I sort of had to adjust everything sideways. It was this enormous period of frantic activity: 3 students, 2 assistants and myself running around. Things got really quiet when I had to go back to the measurements; not that students weren't helping me with the measurements, but they really enjoyed the spray so they kept going with that. I did some of my work and let other people do it, too, and so it was great confirmation that not only did people like it, but they could do it, and they did it with no problem. The students might say that they were intimidated in the beginning, but I think that their hurdles were sort of over after a while. The process was delightful; the fact that they would text me saying, "Hey can I come at 8:30?" was great! I was like, "I've never had a student show up at 8:30," so...

My last question relates to your personal works and views as an artist. Are you concerned about loss of visual artistry and craftsmanship because of the immense usage of technology nowadays?

I think technology is a tool like any other. A number of artists from the Renaissance to current days have used technological systems. So, I guess it permitted and allowed them to work with more of everything, and so they did it. Others preferred not to, so I think it's sort of a personal judgment. Computers doing things is just a tool like any other and I don't think it's going to blur the issue; I think that those who want to approach craft will and those who don't, won't. Do I use technology for my works? No. I only use a camera to record the actions of my piece so that if my instructions are written in a way that's confusing, I can go back to them. I love drawing – it's sort of the most primitive medium; I do draw representational too, by the way, and I just think that that connection with the hand into the eye into the brain and into paper or the wall is fascinating and rewarding and ever so complex that I don't think that adding technology to it is necessary; it's fascinating enough to me as it is, but that's definitely a personal opinion.

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