

# Robleto adds inventive new air to Seattle museum

Curator knew his way with folk art would be a good fit with the Frye's collection of 19th-century paintings.

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Charged with reinvigorating the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, curator Robin Held knew just the artist to "remix" the small, private museum primarily known for its collection of 19th-century German artists — San Antonio's Dario Robleto.

"There was no question that Dario was the right artist," Held said in a phone interview. "We've been talking since 1999, and I knew that his use of 19th-century folk art forms would go well with our permanent collection. Dario is an interesting figure because he's chosen to live in San Antonio, but he's shown that you can work from places other than New York. His sensitivity to his materials and to history made him a perfect choice to work with our collections."

Robleto has two shows on view at the Frye. "Heaven Is Being a Memory to Others," which runs through Aug. 10, features eight of his sculptural works installed with 20 paintings from the Frye's collections. "Dario Robleto: Alloy of Love," through Sept. 1, is a 10-year survey of his career featuring a comprehensive catalog edited by curator Elizabeth Dunbar of Austin's Arthouse at the Jones Center.

Charles Frye was a German emigrant who became the successful owner of a meatpacking company in Seattle. He and his wife, Emma, bought their first European painting at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, and eventually acquired some 250 works. The couple never had children, and Emma died in 1934. He died in 1940, and his will provided for the foundation of a free public art museum, which opened in 1952.

In doing his research, Robleto was immediately attracted to the story of Emma.

"I was brought in to re-imagine the collection," he said. "But there really wasn't much to research because there wasn't much family correspondence or other papers. So I tried to think like Emma. I noticed that the collection has several images of mothers and children. But Emma never had children, so I began to think of the paintings as her children. I made eight new works in response to the collection, which became



"Alloy of Love," 2005, includes material from soldiers' uniforms.



"Obsequies in Albany" dates from 2006.



"The Melancholic Refuses to Surrender" is from 2003.





PHOTOS COURTESY FRYE ART MUSEUM

"An instinct Toward Life Only a Phantom Can Know" (above) is part of "Heaven Is Being a Memory to Others"; "Dario's Shredded Love Letters" (below) is in "Dario Robleto: Alloy of Love."



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Explore the museums and galleries exhibiting Robleto's work.

'Heaven Is Being a Memory to Others.'

Robleto imagined roles Emma might have played — lover, bride, wife, thwarted mother, music lover, art collector. He created a 16-foot trail of Victorian-styled homemade flowers for her wedding train. He paired his sculptures with psychologically charged portraits of heroes, socialites, children and family groups.

Since the Frye's collection is usually installed salon-style, Robleto's minimalist installation has given an entirely new look to the museum, Held said.

"Alloy of Love" covers the first 10 years of Robleto's career, ranging from work that debuted at the Blue Star Contemporary Art Center in 1998 to his "Chrysanthemum Anthems" series that traveled in 2006-2007 to museums near Civil War battlefields.

After Seattle, "Alloy of Love" will travel to the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, New York, which is the co-organizer of the exhibit.

Here's a guide to other exhibits featuring work by Robleto this year:

"Oh, Those Mirrors with Memory," Inman Gallery, Houston (closed May 24): "I

think Dario is one of the most important young artists working today, but I'm not exactly objective," said Kerry Inman, gallery director. She's been his principal dealer in Texas since 1999. This exhibit featured text pieces, documenting private actions, that were part of an installation for the sixth Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil, curated by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro in 2007.

For example, in "We'll Dance Our Way Out of the Womb," Robleto explained, "Over the course of a month, I secretly exchanged the existing light bulbs from the front porch of every house in the neighborhood block I grew up on with a higher-wattage light bulb, thereby making the whole block significantly brighter at night."

"NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith," Menil Collection, Houston, through Sept. 21: Curator Franklin Sirmans said the exhibit "grew out of a desire to explore the multiple meanings of spirituality in contemporary art." Works range from the frenzied images of self-taught painter Jean-Michel Basquiat to the calm, contemplative photographs of a monk strolling through a cemetery by Ernesto Pujol.

"Not Quite How I Remember It," The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, through Sept. 1. Curator Helena Reckitt is highlighting forms of reenactment and reconstruction, investigat-

ing how artists engage with events, narratives and cultural artifacts from the past. Exhibit includes Robleto's piece made from candy wrappers taken from a Felix Gonzalez-Torres installation.

"Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet," Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (opens Aug. 17): Robleto was one of eight well-known artists commissioned to create site-specific works after visiting eight UNESCO World Heritage sites. Robleto made visits to Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park on the Montana-Alberta border. He said the glaciers are melting so fast that mammoth bones are being washed out, and he used a mammoth bone as well as the claw of a long-extinct cave bear in his sculptures.

"The Old, Weird America," Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (opens Aug. 23): Contemporary Art Museum, Houston curator Toby Kamps may have identified the first major movement of the 21st century — young artists who are rediscovering the country's roots using folk art forms.

"The Marfa Sessions," Ballroom Marfa (opens Sept. 27): Curators Regine Basha, Rebecca Gates and Lucy Raven invited 15 artists to create a series of sound projects that will be embedded within the public spaces and private corners of the small West Texas town.