

Expansive vision

The generous Nasher XChange project brings art to the people of Dallas

By RICK BRETTELL

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The Nasher Sculpture Center is celebrating its first decade in a grandly generous manner that founding patrons Patsy and Raymond Nasher would surely endorse. Its Nasher XChange project has seeded locations in the Dallas area — both well known and very obscure — with art.

The Nashers' renowned collection of late 19th-century and early 20th-century sculpture formed the core of the Dallas Arts District landmark that opened in 2003. But long before that, the couple brought art to an enormous non-museum audience by purchasing and commissioning artworks for the crown jewel of the Nasher real estate empire, NorthPark Center.

Nasher XChange is in the same spirit. The \$3 million endeavor uses the whole city and its environs as a setting to introduce nine artists and one artist collective in scattered sites and to commis-

sion two of the works in their own areas, missing the scope of the overall project. Thankfully, a very useful and well-executed Web app links all 10 into a whole.

Ways to see

The first way to approach this unwieldy indoor-outdoor "exhibition" is to think about the sites, which vary geographically, culturally and institutionally.

There are two educational institutions and two shopping venues — one is NorthPark, the other the immigrant markets in Vickery Meadow. There are forays into urban nature with the man-made Fish Trap Lake and the Great Trinity Forest with its Audubon Center. Some of the city's signature monuments are involved — I.M. Pei's Dallas City Hall, the commercial office building Bryan Tower and the Nasher Sculpture Center.

The artists themselves are also well-distributed by origin.

Three live in countries different than their native lands and thus come with a cosmopolitan flair — a Spaniard living in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, Lara Almarcegui; a Chilean living in New York, Alfredo Jaar; and a Swiss living in New York, Ugo Rondinone.

Three Los Angeles-based artists — Liz Larner, Charles Long and Ruben Ochoa — bring a little geographical balance to the New York contingent, which, in addition to the

foreign-born Jaar and Rondinone, includes Rachel Harrison.

The Nasher Center was also anxious not to forget about regional creativity. Two artists and one collective from Texas round out the 10 — Rick Lowe from Houston, Vicki Meek of Dallas and Denton's Good/Bad Art Collective. The collective's piece in Bryan Tower, with its huge half-heads wearing Ray-Bans in primary colors, projectors and illuminated cybercoffin, is one of the most exciting offerings in XChange.

Variety is key

What does this all add up to? The answer is that it doesn't add up at all. Nasher XChange is about variety — of approach, origin, message, medium, location and intention. The Nasher Center didn't impose its will on the participants, but instead provided each with the necessary resources to make an object, perform an intervention, create a social drama or a combination of those functions.

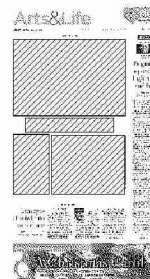
Some of them went high-tech. Long, Larner and Jaar, who recorded the cries of newborns for his Nasher Center installation, made extensive use of digital technology and simulation. Others spent their money hiring researchers, learning about printing photographs on porcelain, renting trucks to bring materials from elsewhere, researching land-use and habitation patterns in South Dallas, talking with

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sion works that embody each of their responses to the chosen site. Their intended audience is not the art world, but people of every race and culture and all levels of education here.

The project is almost impossibly ambitious — and it is also risky, because so few people will experience all 10 works. This in itself requires at least a day of driving, stopping, thinking, eating, buying, looking, drinking, talking, obeying the GPS voice, etc. Not for the faint of heart.

What will happen is that many will experience one or



neighborhood volunteers and translators and the like.

No two works are remotely alike, and this almost-libertari-

Plan your life

Nasher XChange continues through Feb. 16 at various locations. Info: 214-242-5100 or nashersculpturecenter.org or download "Nasher XChange" app for the iPhone from the Apple store.

SEE more of Nasher XChange, dallasnews.com/arts.

an trust in the individual vision of the artists makes it difficult to think of Nasher XChange as something "curated" by the center itself.

Seeing it in a day is a little like going to a large potluck meal in which no guest has been told whether to bring potatoes, salad or meat — or, more aptly, whether the supper is Asian, Indian or Texas barbecue.

The real joy comes not from art itself, but from the way that art helps each of us better understand the city.

Learning about the bracing cultural education of African-Americans in the 1960s and '70s at Bishop College (now Paul Quinn College) is a revelation, along with its creator, Meek. Driving down a small street in south Oak Cliff being transformed by Habitat for Humanity was a good deal more eye-opening than the artwork we're intended to see — a house ritually buried by Almarcegui that looks for all the world like a vacant lot with a label.

Mixed results

I confess to liking the idea of Nasher XChange more than its execution.

Even with its homage to Henry Moore, Harrison's piece in City Hall Plaza is silly — an expensively fabricated visual one-liner that does not benefit from deeper thought.

Long erected an object called *Fountainhead* in NorthPark Center that links, according to him, Ayn Rand, digital technology and capitalist shopping binges into a "three-coins-in-the-fountain" feel-good experience in convenient, credit card charity. The hideous neo-Gatsby graphics and the even sillier base for the work do little to help.

Ochoa's creation looks as if a tornado had ripped a bunch of suburban chain-link fences out of the ground and hurled them at the parking lot of the Audubon Center.

Am I being too hard? Maybe a little. But I do hope that the Nasher Center does it again because the museum has now learned the ins and outs of a complex experiment in urban arts patronage.

To quibble with the concept or the choices of sites is not particularly productive. But the choice of artists is another matter, and many, despite stellar reputations, are not at their best in Nasher XChange. And, to think about the demographics of contemporary Dallas, one wonders why artists from India, China or Africa are absent.

For me, the works that are the most important are the southern- and northernmost. Meek's work of art disguised as a series of educational panels is deeply intelligent, unpretentious, anti-theoretical and direct. Larner's polished stainless-steel sculpture on my own campus, the University of Texas at Dallas, is sublimely beautiful. It's the only conventional sculpture of the 10 and proves there is life in stable

three-dimensional art.

If Nasher XChange does little else than teach us about Dallas itself, it will have succeeded in doing a lot. More compelling works of art and the framing concept to link them would have been even better.

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Photos by Sarah Hoffman/Staff Photographer

For his installation at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Alfredo Jaar recorded the cries of newborns for *Music (Everything I know I learned the day my son was born)*. The work is one of 10 commissioned for the Nasher's anniversary.

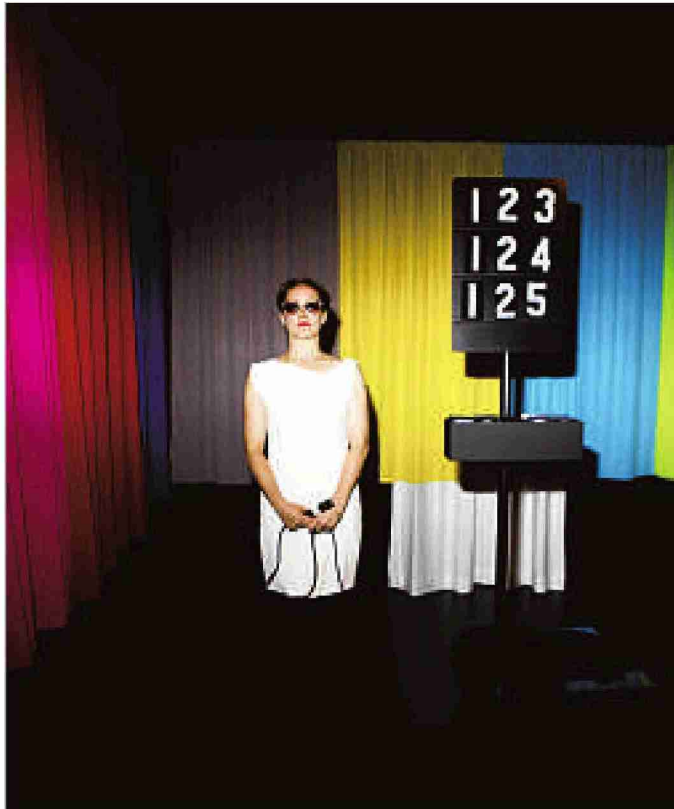


Ruben Ochoa's *Flock in Space* at the Trinity River Audubon Center looks as if suburban chain-link fences have been ripped out of the ground and hurled at the parking lot.



Photos by Sarah Hoffman/Staff Photographer

Fountainhead by Charles Long has been erected at NorthPark Center.



Kristen Butler of Good/Bad Art Collective stands at attention for *Curtains* during a tour of the XChange works.

DALLAS

Liz Larner,
University of Texas at Dallas

RICHARDSON

Charles Long,
NorthPark Center

Rick Lowe,
Vickery Meadow

Alfredo Jaar,
Nasher Sculpture Center garden

Good/Bad Art Collective,
Bryan Tower

Rachel Harrison,
Dallas City Hall

Ugo Rondinone,
Fish Trap Lake

Ruben Ochoa,
Trinity River Audubon Center

Lara Almarcegui,
Exeter Avenue

Vicki Meek,
Paul Quinn College

Park Cities

D/FW

Cockrell Hill

Interstates: 30, 35E, 45, 75, 78, 289, 190, 635, 354, 180, 67, 342, 352, 30

Local Roads: Loop 12, Loop 12E, Loop 12W, Loop 12S, Loop 12N

Landmarks: Dallas North Tollway, Fish Trap Lake, Audubon Center, Paul Quinn College

Scale: 2 miles

North Arrow: N

SOURCE: *Dallas Morning News* research

Staff Graphic



Nasher Sculpture Center

Liz Larner's X at the Edith O'Donnell Arts and Technology Building at the University of Texas at Dallas proves that there's life in stable three-dimensional art.