Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Art and Beer at 18th Street Art Center

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Art and beer is so much more refreshing than art and wine. I experienced this perfect combination today at Santa Monica's 18th Street Art Center, which hosted an open gallery-beer tasting.

There were hundreds of people who would never come to taste wine. Many had never been to the Center before, which offers below-market rate studio and production space for local artists, plus subsidized residencies for visiting US and international artists. I went because my wife's on their board, but I stayed because it was a great good time.

I had conversations with a dozen people I hadn't met before and we talked about art. Everyone had an opinion, yet everyone also expressed a bit of mystification about how to discuss visual art. Why, one woman wondered, do orchestras have pre-show audience discussions to encourage music appreciation, but galleries don't do something similar? Why are we expected to experience visual art alone, one-on-one, ourselves with the painting on the wall, instead of experiencing visual art with a full audience of people, as we might a rock concert?

These are good questions – questions that challenge our conventional notions of how we respond to art. They're also populist questions. We don't have a popular language to discuss how art makes of feel.

In fact, *we have more words to describe how beer tastes than we have to describe how we respond to creativity.* That's one of the reasons I started CulturalWeekly.com – to open a national dialogue and find a popular vocabulary to discuss creative works.

My favorite beer, by the way, was an amber ale from Ballast Point Brewing Company in San Diego. It is medium amber, almost caramel color with a hint of orange. There's a fine white head that smoothly lay on top. It smells of sweet malt, with a touch of hops, fresh cut grass and tangerine peel. The taste is crisp with mild carbonation, herbal towards the top of my mouth. Then it descends to caramel and chocolate as it moves lower in my palate, teasing with a hint of brown butter before finishing cleanly and easily.

Now, tell me about that painting over there?

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