

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Seeing and Re-Seeing Dan Romero's Work In the Inland Valleys

John Brantingham · Wednesday, July 8th, 2020

Art museums have opened up again, but I'm not comfortable going yet. I'm not worried for myself, but for my parents and immunocompromised friends and neighbors, and this fact is hard for me as a poet who writes ekphrasis (writing that talks about art, think "Ode on a Grecian Urn," not that I'm comparing myself to Keats). So I've taken to exploring and thinking about the public art in the Inland Empire, which is where I live and work, and there's a lot to see.

One of my favorite living artists is Dan Romero whose sculpture is filled with humanity and whose metal work can be seen in a number of places in the area. It's the metal work that I'm interested in right now because it is out around the town and meant for everyone. I can drive to Redlands or walk down the street in Ontario where I live, and experience the world through his perspective. In the world before COVID 19, I would often drive past this work, just a part of the cultural white noise that I needed to ignore to get through my day, but if COVID 19 has gifted me anything it is the ability to slow down and look at this place where I live.

In fact, I live a ten minute walk from The Moment, a metal sculpture in a pocket park hidden near the Ontario library and city hall complex. I love the movement in his work. In this kinetic sculpture, counterbalanced birds catch the wind and rock back and forth in a whimsical moment. This tiny park actually contains several interesting pieces including a sundial, three benches dedicated to the moon, and a sculpture carved out of the still standing trunk of a dead tree.

Another interesting piece is his Sister Cities Clock Arches, three clocks set to the time of Redlands' sister cities, Hino, Japan, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, and Linli, China. It's a clock with a large glass casing where steel spheres roll down metal runners. It's fascinating to watch and fairly hypnotic.



One of the things that art can do for us is to help us reconceptualize and resee what is there before us, and maybe both of these pieces do that to our understanding of birds and time. Or maybe they're just fun to stare at. We don't stare and let our minds wander enough in this world. Let's do that. Let's take a moment for the world that we don't usually see.

Redland's Sister Cities Clock Arches by Dan Romero

In this quarantine, time refuses to ballast itself.
 Some days pass like eras of lazing
 and dreaming of physical touch,
 afternoons tackling friends in pickup
 football games and evenings making love
 to strangers, and some weeks go by
 in what seems like an hour-long meditation.

Kurt Vonnegut warned you about this.
 So did Dan Romero,
 whose spheres of time dripped
 and spun at different rates
 and you wish now that you'd listened
 to either one of those sages.

It's hard to remember what it was like
 before the days went cattywampus. Maybe there was no time before this,
 just an eternal reckless loop
 eating back on itself, and if that's true,
 you hope you bounce, Vonnegut-style,
 back to a moment of your childhood,
 when you took your sled down the street
 to the school where there was a hillock
 that seemed monstrous to you,
 and you rode it over and over alone,
 everyone else afraid of cold in a way you didn't understand.
 That afternoon seemed
 to stretch out into the forever,
 time not a thing then either.

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The Moment by Dan Romero

When the bird comes
 around the corner
 of the building
 and flurries past you
 just two feet over the BMW
 with the strains
 of Thelonious Monk
 leaking out,
 you are too
 caught up in trying
 to understand
 what's happening
 to actually see it,
 so the moment
 of the bird

is lived only in memory,
not time and space,
captured and romantic
in that inward place.

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