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# Artists give peace a chance

## LUMA hosts an exhibition inspired by the Dalai Lama.

By Jake Malooley



Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, *The Scribe*, 2005.

A 25-foot-long inflatable Buddha. A 100-pound mound of salt. 120 chanting monks projected onto a wall. Considering the mammoth size and international scope of Loyola University Museum of Arts' "The Missing Peace"—a traveling exhibit of 88 artists from 25 countries that opens Saturday 28—it's hard to believe it started out as a simple Dalai Lama portrait project.

"I remember saying, 'I'm not partial to portraits,'" says Darlene Markovich, executive director of "The Missing Peace" and the president of the Committee of 100 for Tibet (one of the two nonprofit organizers of the exhibit, alongside the Dalai Lama Foundation). "But I am partial to what the Dalai Lama stands for, the full portrayal of his life and what he means to artists."

Wanting to showcase artists' responses to the Dalai Lama, Markovich met with His Holiness in 2003 and requested a blessing to go forth with the project. "He thought about it and said, 'Focus on peace and not me.' And I assured him the portraits would be universal portraits of what he stands for," she says. "Not necessarily Buddhist, not necessarily Tibet, but the universal messages he speaks to all people."

With the project greenlit by the Dalai Lama, Markovich hired curator Randy Rosenberg (former curator of the World Bank's art collection) to recruit contemporary artists whose work in various media would resonate with the ideals and values of the Dalai Lama.

One of the first artists who came to Rosenberg's mind was Bill Viola, whose trademark large-scale video installations are imbued with what she calls "profound spirituality." For one of his two contributions to "The Missing Peace," Viola traveled to Dharamsala, India, to capture video of the Dalai Lama delivering prayers. In Viola's other piece, *Bodies of Light*, a glowing bulb points out the seven chakras—internal points of energy—in a man and a woman on side-by-side flat screens. By illuminating these chakras, Viola seems to urge us to harness their power.

While Viola's pieces were somewhat expected, Markovich and Rosenberg were in the dark about the majority of the artwork until it arrived in L.A. for the show's premiere—something that made the exhibit a tough sell to perspective venues. "We didn't know what size anything was going to be, what the complexity would be or what the themes would be," Markovich says. "We just told the artists to take a year and a half and create something meaningful: any media, no restrictions."

One of the biggest surprises must have been **Lewis deSoto's *Paranirvana***, a 25-foot-long, 7-foot-wide, 6-foot-tall inflatable Buddha that looks like something from a Macy's parade. While the original, which is carved out of a cliff in Sri Lanka, depicts Buddha dying of food poisoning, DeSoto superimposed his face on the figure as a reminder that he will one day be on the cusp of death.

DeSoto's piece is in "Empathy and Compassion," the fourth of ten themed areas of the exhibition, which also includes a *thangka* painting on loan from the Dalai Lama. The first theme, "Interpreted Portraits," even shows some remnants of the show's beginnings: Chuck Close's straightforward photo of a smiling Dalai Lama, for example. Rosenberg sees the organization as a spiral. "The beginning focuses on more concrete concepts of the Dalai Lama," she says. "The show then circles outward and becomes more abstract."

Dario Campanile's surrealist painting *Peace is with Us* is a most striking, optimistic prophecy for the impact that this exhibit could have as it travels next to New York. A dove breaks its chain leash and bursts majestically through the center of the Dalai Lama's newspaper. The headline that day: missing peace found.

"As all these artists demonstrate," Markovich says, "each of us with our own unique talents can contribute to a more peaceful world. So, in a way, this exhibition is a call to action."

*"The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama," at the Loyola University Museum of Art, opens Saturday 28 is on exhibit through January 15, 2007.*