

Audience response to exhibit at Fairplex's Millard Sheets Art Center reflects public's desire for fine art, artist says



One Path Two Journeys exhibit , featuring the work of artists Judith Hernandez and Patssi Valdez, inside the Millard Sheets Art Center at Fairplex in Pomona, Ca., September 14, 2017. (Photo by John Valenzuela/Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

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POMONA >> During the 2017 LA County Fair, tens of thousands of people stepped away from the fried foods and carnival rides to visit the Millard Sheets Art Center at Fairplex and see the work of artists of Judith Hernandez and Patssi Valdez.

More than 85,000 visitors passed through the doors of the center to see their exhibit, One Path Two Journeys.

That pleases Hernandez.

"I have received the most wonderful emails from people who went," she said this week.

Some commenters told her the exhibit has inspired them to seek out and visit more art exhibits, she said. Other said they gained a better understanding of Mexican-American culture.

"That's exactly what I want," said Hernandez, who has also taught at the university level for three decades.

The exhibit is part of the Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, an initiative that explores Latin-American and Latino art in Los Angeles.

One Path Two Journeys came together after Hernandez was invited to exhibit at the Millard Sheets Art Center. When she saw the gallery, she proposed having Valdez join her.

Each woman was part of male-dominated artists collectives that carried ground-breaking work during the 1970s and 1980s.

Hernandez was part of Los Four. She created murals with the group, but she also produced art pieces and paintings with feminist themes that focused on women's labor and migrants, according to a statement from Fairplex.

Valdez was part of Asco, and is also recognized as a performance artist and photographer.

The two artists moved in the same art circles in the '70s, Hernandez said. They were familiar with each other's work, but they never showed together.

The invitation to exhibit at Fairplex presented an opportunity, Hernandez said.

"I've always wanted to show with her," she said. "I thought how interesting it would be to finally have a visual conversation."

Valdez accepted the invitation and One Path Two Journeys included some of their earlier work and some of their recent art, Hernandez said.

Each artist has a distinctive style, she said, but both have continued to grow artistically over time and they continue to be engaged.

The work of the two women has continued to draw visitors to the art center, said Thomas Canavan, creative arts and special projects manager at Fairplex.

Some visitors are coming to the art center because they want to see the various exhibits that are part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA but others are coming see Hernandez's and Valdez's art, Canavan said.

"There is so much from Judith and Patssi in one show," he said.

High school art students, including Pomona Unified students, also are coming to see the exhibits as part of field trips, something Canavan is glad to see happening.

"That's something we hadn't seen before," he said.

Two groups of Pomona Unified students visited the exhibit Friday.

One was from Lorbeer Middle School in Diamond Bar and the other from Pomona High School, said Vicki Tessier, a visual and performing arts teacher specialist with the district.

The trips allow art students to see what the art center along with galleries and museums such as the dA Center for the Arts, the American Museum of Ceramic Art and the Claremont Colleges have to offer. It instills pride in young artists, she said.

Through One Path Two Journeys, young artists also get a sense of the history and the style of artists such as Hernandez and Valdez, Tessier said.

Visits such as this also let students see art "is a legitimate field of studies," Tessier said.

Many careers have a direct connection to the arts, she said.

"Part of getting career and college ready is to see artists who have made it," Tessier said.

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