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Van Gogh, Kahlo speak from beyond the grave at Frieze art fair

October 19, 2010 | By Laura Allsop for CNN

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Other highlights at Frieze, London's premier contemporary art fair that draws visitors from across the world, included a special installation project by British-born artist Simon Fujiwara.

Entitled "Frozen," the specially commissioned project imagined that the remains of an ancient civilization had been discovered beneath the site of the fair.

Roped-off excavation zones around the fair showed partially uncovered remains such as tombs, columns and skulls -- all replicas. According to explanatory notes, this fictional civilization was undone by its decadence, surely a comment on pre-recession times.

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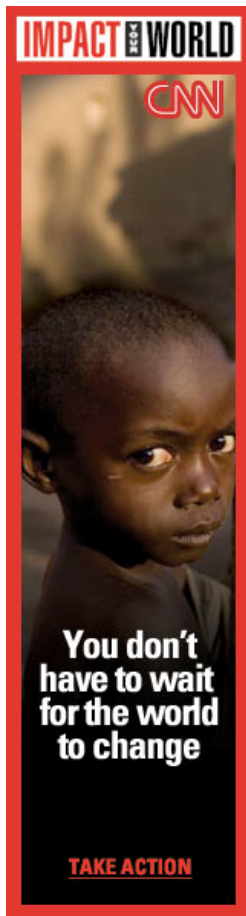
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Fujiwara's forthcoming year is due to be a busy one: he is currently exhibiting work at European art biennial Manifesta in Murcia, Spain, and is slated to have a solo show at Tate St. Ives in Cornwall, where he grew up, in 2011.

Death and humor proved to be popular themes in works of art across the fair. At London gallery Stephen Friedman's stand, irreverent Scottish artist David Shrigley exhibited a taxidermied puppy holding a sign saying: "I'm dead."

The stand, which was filled with the artist's ink drawings and sculptures, was a big draw -- not least because for two days, Shrigley was painting tattoo designs onto willing members of the public, leaving them with the option to decide whether or not they wanted to permanently wear a piece of his art.

Elsewhere, Swedish artist Annika Strom masterminded a performance for a curated component of the fair, commenting on gender inequality in the art world.

Ten male actors wandered about the fair in a group, charged with looking awkward and embarrassed by what Strom sees as the under-representation of female artists in exhibitors' stands at art fairs and across the wider arts.

In addition to real-time performance works, sculptures and installations proved to be popular attractions.

A wooden structure entitled "Reading Room" by Cuban collective Los Carpinteros (The Carpenters) attracted wearied fair-trippers, while its slatted structure became a temporary library for books.

Elsewhere, an installation composed of gently turning globes courtesy of New Delhi-based artist Bharti Kher entitled "Not all who wonder are lost" (2009-10) drew delighted viewers.

Kher has been enjoying positive critical reviews in the last couple of years for her work, which often includes sculptures and paintings covered in thousands of bindis. One such painting, in delicate blue, was also on show at the fair.

The art didn't stop at the tent's confines: outside was a sculpture park featuring works inspiring regular double-takes from visitors entering and leaving the fair.

What looked like a pile of smoking rubbish was in fact an artwork by artist duo Kaj Aune and Wolfgang Ganter -- and out in the street, visitors walked past an upturned car by German artist Hans Peter Feldmann.

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