

A Place to Breathe After The Quake The Art Of Rebuilding

By Linda Cordair



Today, as I sit at my desk, I am surrounded by ghostly forms—sculpted figures enshrouded in protective plastic, their faces, arms, hands, and fingers visible but hazily veiled, as if floating just beneath a watery surface, their bodies suspended, souls asphyxiated. They can't breathe. Neither can I, not yet.

Through the dust in the air and the sporadic noise of power tools, I try to complete calls with artists, clients, structural engineers and contractors. Between emails and texts, I urge the drywallers on, rolling up my sleeves in frustration at times, grabbing a spatula to demonstrate how much more quickly holes and gouges in walls can be mended and filled—if one is sufficiently motivated. I'm motivated. Each day that the gallery is closed is more income lost, more expense incurred.

It's been just three weeks since the earth beneath us rocked and shook, and then more violently, lifting and dropping, over and over again, leaving so much of what had been whole, in pieces. I'll be happy if I never again experience the fear and heartbreak of that night, of being awakened as though in the middle of a car accident. The vehicle still careening, bouncing, and crunching through the darkness, glass breaking, combined with helplessness of not knowing if the space we were in would hold together, not knowing if we were moments from injury or death.

When the house finally came to rest, fortunately we were still intact, at least physically. It was 3:20 in the morning. Our border collie and the one cat we could find were okay. We tried to keep them out of the broken glass. I couldn't find my shoes. Neighbors were trapped in bedrooms, behind or beneath fallen bookcases. An elderly couple a block from us had been thrown out of bed; surrounded by glass, without light, as they lay on the floor together, waiting either for dawn or for someone to come by. A boy's pelvis was crushed beneath bricks from a fallen chimney.

After helping neighbors, we rushed to the gallery. We knew it would be bad, but it was worse. Most of our display windows were broken out and the building's exterior was cracked. The art was exposed, but nothing had been stolen—yet. Within minutes of our arrival, the town's meth-addled vultures were pedaling and strolling by, alone and in pairs,



their glazed eyes scanning, assessing, sizing us up. We stared them down in turn, shining our flashlights on them whenever they came too close. There was no law enforcement in sight and none could be expected anytime soon. A friend guarding a neighbor's business declared loudly that looters would be shot on sight.

What we found inside the gallery broke my heart. Sculptures were fallen, scattered and toppled everywhere, some of them in pieces. An elegant hand, snapped off and missing a finger, lay in a corner beneath a tipped table. The bicep of a female nude looked as if someone had taken a baseball bat to it. Glass table tops and pedestals were broken; paintings clung to walls, precariously askew. Frames of those that had fallen were nicked, gouged. There was a gaping hole in a painted figure's hip. These pieces are our children, the precious creations of our artists, the progeny they've labored so hard and diligently to bring into existence. They entrust their work to us, and we consider ourselves more of an adoption agency. Our job being to find good and loving homes for the treasures passing through our hands. And here they were, many injured, a few beyond repair, all in need of protection and care.

From the first moments that morning, neighbors were helping neighbors. Strangers jumped in to assist with moving exposed art further back into the gallery. Friends showed up almost immediately, despite the damage in their own homes, to help with cleaning up the glass. By dawn, a flatbed truck from a local lumber company was rolling slowly up the street, dispensing plywood free of charge to whomever needed it. A resident we'd never met before brought tools to help us board up. Another stranger brought in a generator for the express purpose of making coffee and charging cell phones. Neighbors brought tools, hugs and coffee. We weren't aware until later that morning that my brother in law, on the other side of the country, had set up a fund for donations (www.gofundme.com/dgzgro) towards the gallery's rebuilding. By the end of the day, thousands of dollars had already poured in from family, friends, clients, and strangers. Our artists have donated paintings and sculpture to be sold or auctioned to help with expenses. Other friends helped move a truckload of the more

ABOVE
Reflection by
Holly Crocker
Garcia

LEFT
Unbound by Karl
Jensen



Decision

Serge Marshennikov

20" x 17" Signed and numbered
giclee print on canvas

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Awaiting the unveiling



Molly's Swing by Quent Cordair

BELOW Imagination by Dellorco

vulnerable art out of the gallery and safely into storage.

As the rebuilding continues, too slowly, I glance occasionally to the sculptures still in the room here with me, the uninjured ones. Even as seen through their plastic veillings, I draw strength, motivation and resolve from them. They fuel me and inspire me in a way that nothing else can. These trying weeks have helped me comprehend, more deeply than ever, why art is so important to so many, why so much assistance would come flooding in to help rebuild it. Our artists work so hard to create the most meaningful, uplifting and inspiring artworks they can. Many times over the years, I've listened to clients' stories of how pieces they own have helped pull them through life's difficulties, spiritual, emotional and material; through illnesses and deaths of loved ones; through lost jobs; through disappointments;

through broken hearts; through despair. And now, it's my turn.

At this moment, I need art more than ever. These objects of beauty and contemplation give me so much, providing the immediate experience of the joyful and inspirational, the romantic and beautiful, the purposeful and peaceful, the happy and serene. Paintings and sculpture reflect and encapsulate all that we worked so hard to build, all that had existed before the quake. Today, they remind me anew, providing the vision of that stylized, beautiful, meaningful world, which through hard work and perseverance, we will rebuild once more.

This is what art is for, to help fuel, to show and remind us of what is important, what is worth pursuing, worth aiming for, worth waiting for, worth building towards again. Art provides that invaluable, distilled

experience of what is lovely and good; of what is important, in and of itself, for its own sake; of what, when broken, is worth rebuilding; of what, when lost, is worth seeking, finding, re-creating.

With art's help, we are rebuilding—for the sake of the art, in the image of the art. These things around me, I love dearly. I will make a place for them again, a place to breathe. There will be a second coming, a rebirth, a new unveiling. I will make it so.

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