

VISUAL ARTS

CREATING GEOGRAPHY

Nato Thompson spearheads the re-invention of place in Albuquerque.

BY ZANE FISCHER
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Because I was trapped at a convention inside Tucson, Ariz.'s version of Buffalo Thunder—a pueblo-style golf resort, minus the casino—the weekend of June 26-28, I missed a succession of big events related to the LAND/ART project. Apparently the weekend was jam-packed with “talks, excursions, receptions and poetry.”

I'm not sad about missing the poetry since 1 percent of poets are artisanal distillers of language and poignancy and the other 99 percent are savage brutes who ravage language, betray the capabilities of art and waste air and syllables that others might put to practical use. I'm not slugging any specific poets into one heap or the other; I'm just admitting to low expectations. Very low. That's right, I burn self-published chapbooks recreationally, and I don't even wait until it's cold outside. But the rest of the weekend was a minor tragedy to miss out on.

In particular, I was looking forward to the panel discussion that launched *Experimental Geography* at The

Albuquerque Museum. It's true that the last time curator Nato Thompson passed through Santa Fe, with Jeremy Deller's *It Is What It Is: Conversations about Iraq* project, he and I had an insipid little argument—or, rather, failed to have one. I wanted to know what value there was in framing the instigation of discussions around a bombed-out car from Iraq in the mantle of art and Thompson thought that made me a tedious douche bag of a “local art critic.”

I thought that made him a defensive and pretentious twit, especially when, the next day, he blogged about all the things he could have said in response to my question but didn't. If he had a case of *esprit d'escalier*, it's not hard to find my email and my number is in the book. Presumably, though, it would have been too tedious, an odd position to take—I thought—in the context of a project aimed at “conversation.”

But Thompson is a hell of a curator and an agile mind to boot, and I'm pretty sure we both get a stiffy over Joseph Beuys and Fluxus, so I'm excited for the exhibition regardless.

I don't really buy the Beuysian concept of “every man” as an artist,

but the re-contextualization of how we live with, interact with and perceive art is a strong component of Thompson's projects. It's a process that is not only fascinating, but crucial to the next steps of cultural evolution and artistic development. Land art, with its relevance to cultural history, public policy and environmental practice, provides an ideal intersection for such curating and art-making strategies.

Experimental Geography examines how the natural world has traditionally been perceived by both science and art and proposes the potential for a new field that encompasses both practices and then some. It is in Albuquerque during the midst of a national tour that goes through 2010 and promises to be an important exhibition for an audience much broader than artists and the art curators.

One project, *Notes for a People's Atlas* by AREA Chicago, invites par-



The interstices and segregations of art and geography are thrown into one big lake at The Albuquerque Museum.

ticipants to download a map of the Albuquerque region and help generate a revisionist urban landscape by “plotting their personal knowledge of places, histories, and ideas.” The project challenges the nature of maps and mapmaking and re-examines our concept of how to demarcate territory and tiers within which we categorize importance. As people go nuts on their maps—with crayon, markers, computer graphics, collage, anything they can think of—the results are displayed at the museum in an evolving exhibition and people-powered investigation of Albuquerque's sense of place and history. Ever-growing notes on everything from built-environment to strange ephemera provide reason enough for repeat visits.

And if you bump into Thompson, tell him I said, “No hard feelings.”

EXPERIMENTAL GEOGRAPHY

Through Sept. 20
The Albuquerque Museum
2000 Mountain Road NW,
Albuquerque
505-243-7255
landartnm.org