

BOB FREIMARK

# Art of Dissent



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Mexican Heritage Plaza, San José, CA February 8 – April 8, 2007



Published in conjunction with the exhibition:  
**Bob Freimark: Art of Dissent**

Curated by Peter Selz,  
Founding Director of the UC Berkeley Museum of Art  
and Professor Emeritus of Art History at Berkeley

Mexican Heritage Plaza, San Jose, CA February 8-April 8, 2007

This publication was made possible in part through the generous support of Grass Valley Studios, Hart Gallery of Palm Desert, the City of San Jose and the San Jose Redevelopment Agency.

Special thanks to Peter Selz and to Marcela Davison-Aviles and the staff of the Mexican Heritage Plaza.

Fine Art Photography: Grass Valley Studios, Morgan Hill, CA Reynaldo Barrioz, Felton, CA

Catalogue Design: GESTUDIA, San Francisco, CA

Printed in U.S.A.  
©2007 Mexican Heritage Corporation  
1700 Alum Rock Avenue  
San Jose, CA 95116  
[www.mhcviva.org](http://www.mhcviva.org)

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Art ©Bob Freimark

Cover Art: Los Desaparecidos IV 2001

## FOREWORD

The Mexican Heritage Plaza is proud to present the work of a veteran of the San Jose and Silicon Valley arts movement, Bob Freimark. This exhibition, aptly named "Art of Dissent", marries art and social commentary to *create* the critical elements of a civic culture—discourse which is open, free and candid in a way that is meaningful and impacting.

Our neighborhood was a fertile ground for artful dissent during the Civil Rights movement and was home to voices that changed the nation. In our mission to affirm, celebrate, and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Mexican community and showcase multicultural arts in the region, we celebrate these artful dissenters. We acknowledge those such as Bob Freimark who dare to give voice to marginalized communities. Bob's work calls us to think, act and live. We are honored to present this invitation to do just that.

*Mexican Heritage Plaza*

# VIOLENCE, MURDER, WAR

## Curator's Statement

In 1988 Bob Freemark made a compelling painting: *The Intense Pain of Dolores Huerta Suffered at the Hands of the San Francisco Police* (Plate 1). It was his response to seeing the brutal assault on the woman by four or five policemen hitting her until she collapsed. Huerta suffered broken ribs and a ruptured spleen. Dolores Huerta was the first leader of the United Farm Workers. As a woman she could not be the president, a position taken by her friend Cesar Chavez. She was an early activist in the Women's Movement. In 1988 she took part in a demonstration against President George Bush I and the first Gulf War, when the police singled her out and beat her to the ground. Freemark saw the battering on the evening TV news and was outraged. "And then came the dawn", he wrote, "I am an artist. Each person can do something within his or her capacity. My obligation was to paint my reaction to this horror, and to document it for the world to see how San Francisco had shamed itself, and how the Bush regime was implicated. Once I saw the light, I went into action. It was cold outside, and rainy—but this documentation had to be set forth and completed. I set to work on it and the painting was accomplished before a week had passed."

In the painting he dressed the woman in white fabric which he fastened to the canvas. With its lace it looks like a wedding dress. A network of orange lines strikes the body, displaying the shock and pain she must have felt when she was struck. Her blood pours out on the American flag at her feet. Directly above her, the artist has painted a scalp, which he tells us refers to the Black Elk, who in the Native American war in the Dakota Territory scalped one of General Custer's soldiers. On the top of the painting there are Aztec symbols, including the stylized red eagle with extended wings, which became the emblem of the UFW. The area of grays and blues on the lower right is simply a vigorous gesture of the artist, swinging a wild brush like an Action Painter. Freemark framed the canvas with rough ropes which he fastened with grommets, the way he used to do it in the Navy. The finished painting was then placed on top of a linen canvas and placed in its outer frame. Freemark also made a video of the painting which was used in the lawsuit against the SFPD, a case Huerta won and which led to a change of rules of police action in crowd control. Was this a victory of art over brutality? The painting was shown in 1988 at the Triton Museum in Santa Clara, where

a *delegate* of the UFW made Bob Freimark an honorary member of the Union. The artist, wanting the world to see what had happened here, sent monotypes based on the painting to his gallery in Munich.

Earlier, in 1976, when Freimark had exhibitions in Germany he felt he had to go to Auschwitz, where he walked around the crematorium furnaces and saw human hair and gold teeth. Again, the impact of this experience prompted him to respond as an artist and he produced a series of lithographs, such as *Krematorium* (Plate 4). All we see is two black oven doors with uniforms, resembling human beings hanging in front of the furnace. The floors are painted in a dark yellow and there is a black border of mourning on the edge of the print. The utter monstrosity of the Holocaust is almost impossible to depict visually or describe verbally, so Freimark has opted to show simply the black doors of the oven.

*Wing Fragments* (1996) is not as somber a work. This rather abstract painting was done in memory of the "Red Baron", Manfred von Richthofen, the German aviator, who was said to have shot down eighty enemy aircraft in World War I, and who became a legend. Freimark's painting is an abstract rendition of white bird-like creatures, edged in white bands against a red ground. The vehement and vibrant color and the ferocious brushstroke in this painting relates it to the work of the Abstract Expressionists, who were the strongest force in American painting when Bob Freimark was an art student at the Cranbrook Academy in the early fifties.

#### **LOS DESAPARECIDOS**

During a 2000 trip to Argentina, Freimark heard directly from the voices of survivors of the horror perpetrated during the Fascist dictatorship of the 1970s when at least 30,000 Argentineans were made to "disappear". Thugs, wearing masks, would rip people out of bed or men in civilian clothes would drag people off the street into waiting automobiles. Most of them were never seen again. This was done under the so-called Condor Plan, which Henry Kissinger helped organize with the pretext of fighting Communism. These perpetrated acts ended in torture, murder and burials in mass graves in remote areas. Other victims were thrown out of airplanes into the sea. Sometimes whole families were taken away. The thugs went especially

after pregnant women, to take their babies to be brought up by strangers who were sympathetic to the government. The young mothers were often killed. Eventually a heroic group of older women took the risk of demonstrating in the main square of Buenos Aires and Las Madres de la Plaza demanded to know the whereabouts of their stolen children. Their action (and the Falkland Island disaster) helped bring about the end of the Fascist dictatorship. Freimark responded to the atrocities with a series of watercolors, drawings and prints to commemorate Los Desaparecidos (Plate 3). There are a number of horizontal monotypes in which we see rows of figures, phantoms of former human beings, standing and walking. The negative spaces between them may indicate those who vanished. Some of the figures were done in dark, motley colors; others are rendered simply in black and white. Fragments of hands, and what appears like ghastly features can be made out in some of the pieces. There is one monotype in which we can see a human at the bottom of a very deep shaft, perhaps referring to a person who was buried alive. There is a watercolor, *Mural de Cabezas* (Plate 5), of a large pile of skulls against a purple sky, done when he thought of the ones who disappeared not.

An evocative work shows a single ghostly figure emerging from, or disappearing into, a black ground. A lithograph, called *Person Disappearing* (2002) is, indeed, a picture of an individual literally falling to pieces. In 2002, when seeing people swimming in Lake Balaton in Hungary, he recalled the stories of people being thrown into the sea and made the stirring watercolor, *Drowning Woman* (Plate 7). The series was first shown at Duke University in North Carolina in 2003. In 2002 he had written, produced and directed the documentary film *Los Desaparecidos*, based largely on interviews with women who survived to tell their stories. The film was shown in twenty international film festivals, received seven awards, including the World Film Festival Houston Award, where it competed with 450 entries.

#### **AMERICAN CRUSADE**

In Stuttgart, rumors about the first Gulf War abounded and the painter set to work on a large picture, *Isn't It About Time for Another War?* (Plate 2). It pictures a large human body, hanging upside down. The carcass has been beheaded. We see its genitals on top and red and black spots, indicating bullet holes on the mottled grey body. The

image was appropriated from the photographs of Mussolini's body hanging from its feet in the Plaza del Duomo in Milan in 1945. But as Susan Sontag knew, photographs are not sufficient and the artisanship of the painter's brush can elicit more intense feeling. Once "Operation Desert Storm", the battle to secure the oil in Kuwait started, Freimark made a lithograph, *Free Kuwait* (Plate 6) in which an abundance of oil derricks, some of them suggesting agitated humans, are neatly arranged in five rows. During the second, more ferocious and ever-lasting Iraq War, the artist produced a large number of watercolors, drawings and prints, which tell the dismal story in an indirect way. George Bush II has not allowed us to see body bags, which had been such a powerful indication of the thousands of soldiers who were killed in Vietnam. So, Freimark has made paintings of body bags, such as *Man and Wife: Iraq* (Plate 8), done in watercolor and acrylic in variations of grays, depicting two dead bodies who seem to be floating in nowhere. Others are bleeding, or are packed and thrown to the ground. There is a watercolor of disembodied legs and arms, another of a bleeding blanket. These body bags are witnesses to the criminality of the current war, in which, at the time of this writing, close to 3,000 American troops have been killed and a vast number wounded. Over 50,000 Iraqis are dead and there are an untold-indeed untold-number of wounded and displaced. Civil war has broken out. In 2006, the artist made a watercolor of a large pile of skulls with blood flowing from a cloud above. Called *Stuff Happens* (Plate 9), it bears the caption, "I saw Jesus in the corner reaching out and weeping... We have all been snookered by G. Bush and the other rotten gang, Cheney and Rove and Rummy and all the flathead gnomes who congregate in Washington to serve mammon. We are up to our necks in shit and they are shooting at our heads. Rummy summarized it all: 'STUFF HAPPENS'".

Bob Freimark has traveled and worked in all corners of the globe since his seven years in the Navy. His work has been seen in Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, (the former) Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Senegal, (the former) Soviet Union, Spain, and the United Kingdom before being seen at the Mexican Heritage Plaza in San Jose.

*Peter Selz*



## DEDICATION

To Lillian Freimark, 1926-2005

Behind my wall of silence  
There is a garden of symmetry  
And love, where friends belong,  
With the soft plop of sandals  
And golden carp around

Open the gate  
Sit at my table,  
For you are recognized and eligible  
Your smile is your place card.

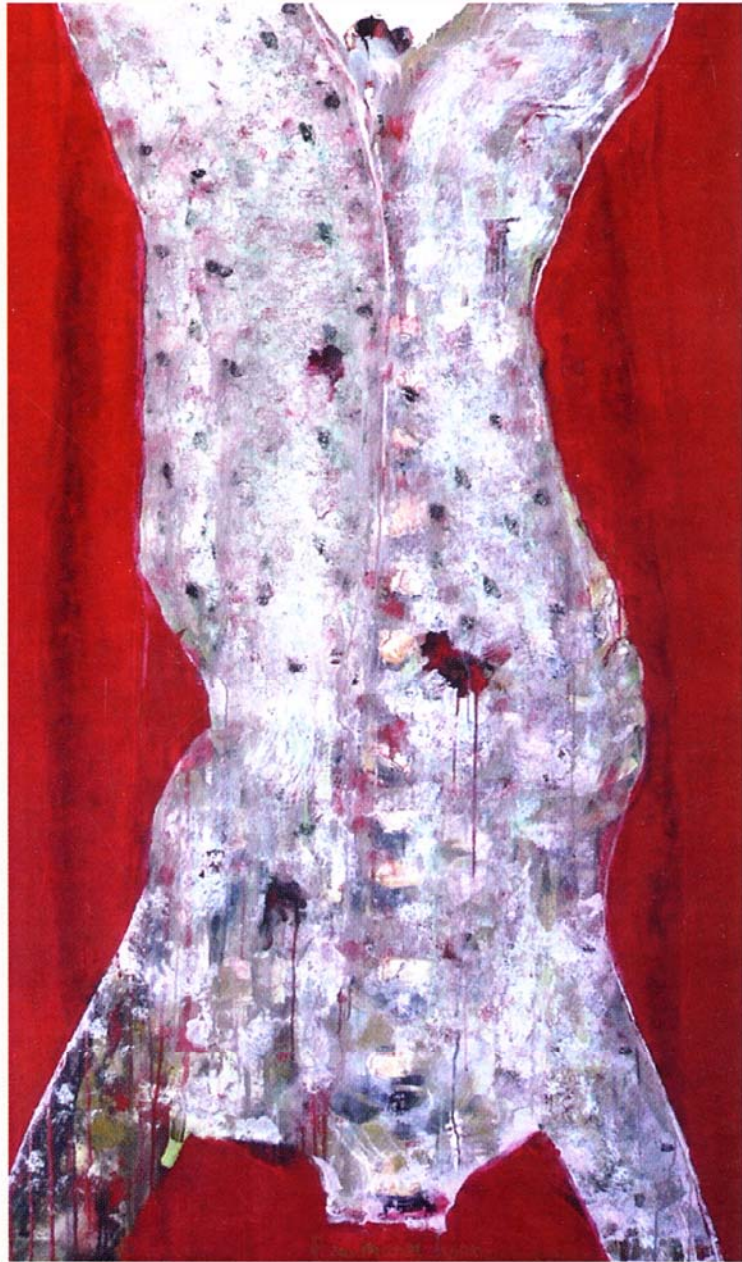
Behind my silence  
I attend my weaving  
Interlapping the love with gratitude,  
The garnish of friendship,  
And one searing dollop of pain.

Bob Freimark, 2005





*Plate 1* The Intense Pain of Dolores Huerta, Suffered at The Hands of The San Francisco Police 1988



*Plate 2* Isn't it About Time for Another War? 1990





*Plate 3 Los Desaparecidos IV 2001*



Krematorium 15/69 Franz Mon 79

Plate 4 Krematorium 1979





Plate 5 Mural de Cabezas 2002



Plate 6 Free Kuwait 1993



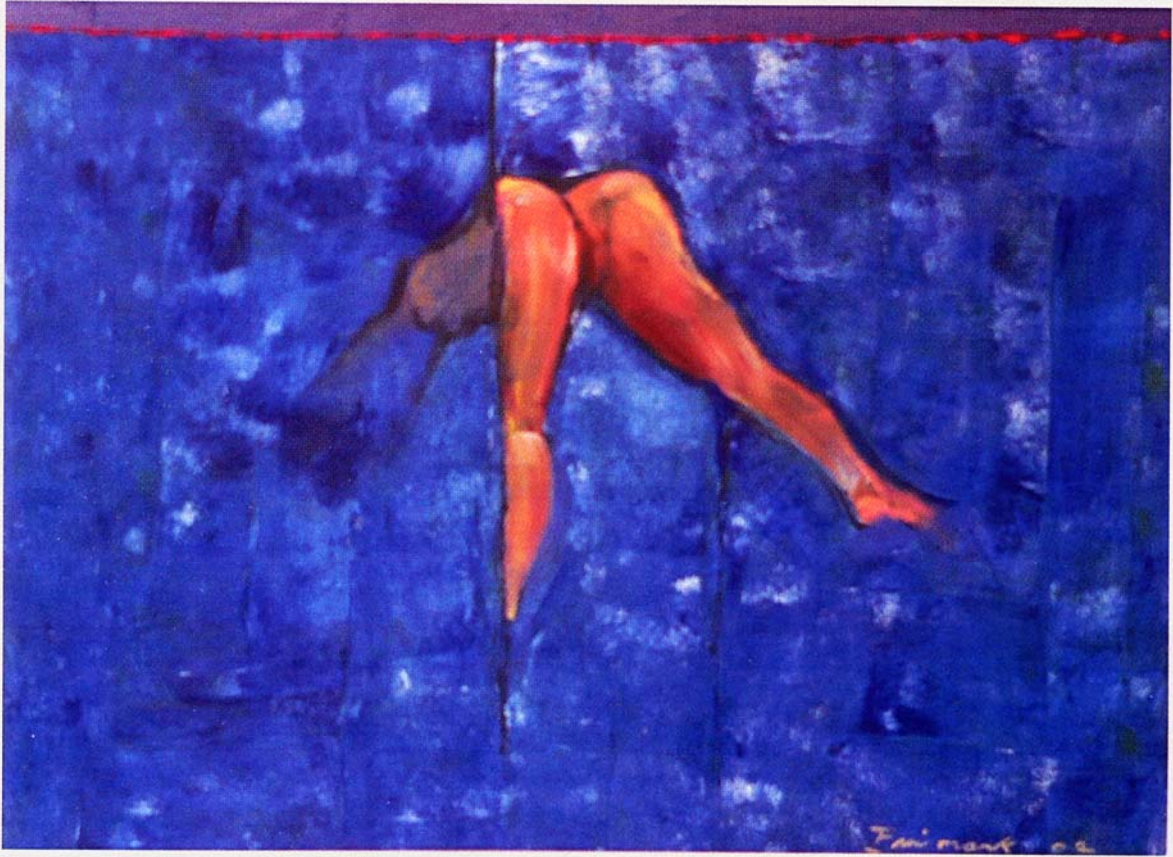


Plate 7 Drowning Woman 2002



Plate 8 Man and Wife Iraq 2005





Plate 9 Stuff Happens 2006



*Plate 10* Figura Suspendida 2005

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

### Los Desaparecidos

LOS DESAPARECIDOS: THE DISAPPEARED ONES CD, 34 Min. Film	2005	MURAL DE CABEZAS Watercolor, 22"x30"	2002
LOS DESAPARECIDOS Acrylic, 68"x68"	2000	OLVIDADOS Watercolor, 22"x30"	1999
DROWNING WOMAN Acrylic on paper/wood, 22"x30"	2002	LOS DESAPARECIDOS Watercolor, 22"x30"	1999
LOS DESAPARECIDOS I Monotype, 22"x30"	2001	DESAPARECIDO Watercolor, 22"x30"	1999
LOS DESAPARECIDOS II Monotype, 22"x30"	2001	DISAPPEARING Watercolor, 30"x22"	1999
LOS DESAPARECIDOS III Monotype, 22"x30"	2001	THE DISSENTER Serigraph 5/25,30"x22"	1963
LOS DESAPARECIDOS IV Monotype, 22"x30"	2001	DER WACHTURM Lithograph 22/25,30"x22"	1979
LOS DESAPARECIDOS V Monotype, 22"x30"	2001	KREMATORIUM Lithograph 15/25,22"x30"	1979
FIGURA SUSPENDIDA Acrylic drawing, 30"x22"	2002	THE INTENSE PAIN OF DOLORES HUERTA, SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO POLICE	
FIGURA SUSPENDIDA Sculpture, mixed media, life size	2005	Acrylic, cloth, rope with trapunto, 108" x 70"	1988
LOS DESAPARECIDOS Drawing, 22"x30"	1998		

## The American Crusade

STUFF HAPPENS Watercolor/charcoal, 42"x30"	2006	PEOPLE AFIRE Watercolor, 22"x30"	2001
AN ARM AND A LEG Watercolor, tape, 22"x30"	2006	WAR DETAILS VI Acrylic on paper/wood, 22"x30"	2000
SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE Watercolor/collage, 22"x30"	2006	WAR DETAILS X Acrylic on paper/wood, 22"x30"	2000
MAN AND WIFE: IRAQ Watercolor/acrylic, 22"x30"	2005	PERSON DISINTEGRATING Lithograph, 30"x22"	2002
DISCARDED BODY BAGS Watercolor, 22"x30"	2006	WAR STORIES Acrylic on canvas, 68"x68" <i>Courtesy Hart Galleries, Palm Desert, CA</i>	2000
BODY BAG Watercolor/pastel, 22"x30"	2005	ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME FOR ANOTHER WAR? Acrylic/linen, 81"x48"	1990
SECOND BODY BAG Watercolor/carbon, 22"x30"	2005	WING FRAGMENTS Acrylic on canvas, 68"x68"	1996
RED, WHITE AND BLUE BODY BAG Watercolor/carbon, 22"x30"	2005	FREE KUWAIT Lithograph, 21"x30"	1993
ANOTHER IRAQI BODY BAG Watercolor, 22"x30"	2005	INSURRECTION Watercolor, 22"x30"	2006
WOMAN IN THE STREET Watercolor, 22"x30"	2005		
BLANKET CASE Watercolor, 22"x30"	2006		

# Biographical Highlights

- 1922** Born: Doster, MI
- 1939-46** United States Navy
- 1950** Graduated: University of Toledo, OH, major in creative writing; Toledo Museum of Art, major in painting
- 1951** MFA, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI; First solo exhibition, Circle Gallery, Detroit
- 1952** Mexican Arena, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, Lambert Prize
- 1954** Art Interests, Inc. Award, Fellowship for study with Max Weber; First NY solo exhibition: Rockefeller Center
- 1955-59** Taught drawing/painting, Ohio Univ, Athens, OH
- 1956** Solo exhibition, Morris Gallery, NYC
- 1957** Elected to New Talent in the USA 1959-63 Artist in Residence, Des Moines Art Center, IA
- 1960** Solo, Minneapolis Institute of Arts (curator: Sam Hunter); Survivor, Brooklyn Museum of Art; Purchase Award: Library of Congress
- 1961** Solo, Harry Salpeter Gallery, NYC; Guest Artist, Joslyn Memorial Museum, Omaha
- 1963** Solo, North American Cultural Institute, Mexico City
- 1965** Ford Foundation Artist in Residence Grant
- 1967** Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Grant
- 1970-71** First American to work in Art Protis, new tapestry technique at Vlnena Woolen Mills, Brno, CSSR; Fifty States under auspices of U.S. State Department and SJSU, Moravske Museum, Brno, CSSR; International People's College, Helsingor, Denmark; Galerie Alliance, Copenhagen; Vaerksted fur Grafisk Kunst, Hjorring, Denmark; Newton-Abbot School of Art, Ikon Gallery, Dartington Hall in Totnes, Center for American Studies at Exeter University-all in England; and Schiller College, Bonnigheim, Germany
- 1971** Fellow at Vaerksted fur Grafisk Kunst with J. Christian Sorenson
- 1972-73** Visiting Professor of Art, Carpenter Center, Harvard University
- 1973** Fellow at Impressions Workshop, Boston; *Two-man exhibition with Stanley William Hayter*, Harold Emst Gallery, Boston
- 1974** Guest Artist, Santa Reparata Centre for Graphic Arts, Firenze
- 1976** *Solo: Fifty States*, Official American Bicentennial offering, 8 Amerika Hausen, Germany
- 1977** Guest Artist, Cranbrook Academy of Art
- 1978** *Solo: They Paint Horses, Don't They?* Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA (catalog by Mark Glazebrook)
- 1980** Invited to create and execute tapestry *Olympic Flame* for Olympic Games in Moscow
- 1984** Founded Artist in Residence Program, Yosemite National Park
- 1985** *Retrospective: Mexico Works*, Wesley Community Center, Phoenix
- 1987** *Solo: Tapestries and Supporting Works*, Joslyn Center for Arts, Torrance, CA and Stanford University, CA; *Solo: 7!>e Intense Pain of Dolores Huerta Suffered at the Hands of the San Francisco Police*, Triton Museum, Santa Clara, CA; *Mujer Sentada* in "Enrichments of the Print Cabinet, 1978-88", Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris
- 1990** *Twenty-Twenty: 20 Tapestries from a 20 Year Period*, Nat'l Conference on Textiles, Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA; Monotypes, Stara Radnice, Brno, and Strahov

Kloster, National Palace, Praha, CSFR; 100 graphic works added to permanent collection, National Gallery of American History, Washington, DC

**1991** *Retrospective: Forty Years of Conflict-Within and Without*, Gavilan College, Gilroy, CA; *Solo Exhibition*, Instituto Guatemalteco, Guatemala City and Convento de Capuchinas, Antigua, Guatemala; Contempo Collection, Tokyo, Japan; Kunsthau Ostbayern, Viechtach, Germany; Created *Blue Ridge Series*, Littleton Studios, Spruce Pine, NC; Fellow at Kunsthau Ostbayern; *Screen Prints 1930s-1960s*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

**1992** *Solo*, Amerika Haus, Stuttgart, Germany; Galerie Katiane (Studio of Corot), St. Ceneri le Gerei, France; Max Planck Institute, Munchen, Germany; Theater Gag, Praha, Czech Republic

**1994** *Solo: The Yellow Period*, SJSU, CA; Guest Artist, Agora Vienna, Austria, created large polychrome sandstone sculpture for Vienna

**1995** Juror's Award for Watercolor, 1 lth Annual Natl. Works on Paper Exhibition, Berkeley Art Center, CA

**1996** *Selections from Insignia Series* to Honor President Vaclav Havel, Palacio Gustavo Capanema, Rio de Janeiro (catalog); Jacoby Palace, Kosice, Czech Republic; Malovny Dum, Trebic

**1997** *Solo*, Parish Gallery, Washington, DC; *Beyond Boundaries*, North American Printmaking Exhibition, Richmond Art Center, CA; Honoring President Vaclav Havel, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Sao Paulo, Brazil; *Landscape Prints*, Carpenter Center Gallery, Harvard University; *Paper Arboretum*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts; *Black Jazz* and *Hasidic Dance* in International Independent Exhibition/ Prints, Kanagawa Prefect Ural Gallery, Japan; *No End in Sight*, Museum of Arts Downtown Los Angeles

**1998** Galerie Weber, Viechtach, Germany (The Diptych as Form); Point Gallery, Brno, Czech Republic (Works on Paper); Divadelni Galerie, Uherske Hradiste, C.R. (Works on Paper); Galeria Galiano, La Habana, Cuba; *Lithography After 200 Years*, Honolulu Academy of Fine Arts, HI; *Insignia Series* International Graphic Triennial, Krakow, Poland (CD Rom)

**1999** Kyoto International Woodprints Association Exhibition and Tour, Kyoto, Japan

**2000** *Solo*, Museo Regla and Taller Canet, Regla, Cuba; 1st Artist in Residence; Casa Laical, La Habana, Cuba; Art Foundry Gallery, Sacramento, CA, with Gerd Knapper; 3rd International Graphic Triennial, Cairo, Egypt; *Twelve Works*, ARTEXPO, NY, NY; 1st Award, San Francisco, Throwback Film Festival, Havana Biennale

**2002** *Solo*, Parish Gallery, Washington, DC; Yassine Art Gallery, Dakar, Senegal; *Monterey Bay Paintings*, Colton Hall Museum, Monterey, CA; Artist in Residence, Lake Balaton, Hungary and Museo Guayasamin, Quito, Ecuador; Mini-Print Int'l, Cadaques, Spain, (catalog)

**2003** *Premiere: Los Desaparecidos Documentary*, University of North Carolina; *First Award, Documentary Short and Freedom Award for Los Desaparecidos*, Dahlonga International, Atlanta, GA

**2004** Egyptian International Print Triennale, Cairo, Egypt

**2005** *Special Gold Medal for Los Desaparecidos Documentary*, World Film Festival, Houston TX, 7 other International Awards

**2007** *Bob Freimarh Art of Dissent*, Mexican Heritage Plaza, San Jose, CA (catalog), curated by Peter Selz; *Between the Curtains: Bob Freimarh's Czech Romance, 1970-1995*, San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles; *Freedom vs. Exploitation = Revolution: Bicentennial Mural created by Freimarh's students with Alan Barnett*, History San Jose, San Jose, CA



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Mexican Heritage Plaza is proud to present this exhibition of the work of Bob Freimark. This publication documents the second fine arts exhibition that our young institution has had the privilege to produce and represents continued growth and public recognition as an emerging regional and national dedicated to celebrating our region's diverse community as well as the rich heritage and culture of Mexico.

The process by which this work of an extraordinary artist has come to our gallery represents a unique and creative collaboration between the Plaza, Bob Freimark and curator Peter Selz.

We wish to thank Hart Gallery of Palm Desert for coordinating the inclusion of "War Stories" in the exhibit.

The Plaza also wishes to express heartfelt appreciation to: City of San Jose, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency, Carlos Perez and the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles.

Finally, a young cultural institution may not succeed in its mission without the support of its stakeholders, friends, contributors, and community leaders who share mutually in its program vision and core mission. We are deeply grateful to: Mexican Heritage Corporation Board of trustees: Eddie Garcia, Daniel Fenton, Rudy Rodriguez, Olga Martin-Steele, Dan Ballestros, Leon Beauchman, Benny Bovedo, Armando Castellano, Anne Marie Eileraas, Margie Gaeta, Dr. Martha J. Kanter, Marce Mora, Nick Petridis, Kimberely Rocha, Honorable George Shirakawa, Jr.

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Exhibition Coordination: Lissa Jones, Epicentro Marketing, The Arnone Group

Catalogue design: GESTUDIA, San Francisco, CA

Catalogue printing: Commercial Printing Service, Santa Cruz, CA



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