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A stool is just the right height to bring artist and artwork in line for final touches. Photo by Mari Erin Roth

News

Local artist places second in 24-hour mural marathon

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Just a few days after completing an outdoor mural in Yuba City, Rafael Blanco pulled an all-nighter to paint a scene in downtown Reno July 15 and 16 for the city's fourth annual 24-hour mural marathon.

The event is a bit of an endurance test, not only because of the continuous 24-hour window for creation, but because the artwork is done on the outside of a downtown building in the Nevada heat.



Feather River College Art Department Director Rafael Blanco starts out painting the background of his mural "canvas" on July 15. The wall art faces Reno's new art park featuring Burning Man sculptures at the corner of North Virginia and Fifth streets. Photo by Mari Erin Roth

Perhaps the 11 days spent in Yuba's 108-degree oven and the three days it took to complete the mural helped to "condition" Blanco for the Reno marathon where seven selected artists were invited to decorate their outdoor "canvas."

But Blanco, Feather River College's art department director, had an informed idea of what was to come. The local artist had experience from the first year of the competition in 2014, and last year in 2016. Judges recognized his talents and awarded him second-place honors both years.

The annual art spectacle is part of a Reno movement called "Artown" that began in 1996 to bring art into the foreground. Art-inspired events occur throughout July.

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prizes for the winners, each of the seven artists received \$150 in food vouchers, accommodations and \$750 for supplies prior to the start of the mural challenge.

During the event, the busy avenue is closed off and vendors set up all along the block. Shade and seating are provided so the public may watch as the art unfolds hour by hour from beginning to end.

Entertainment is peppered throughout the afternoon and evening such as DJ dancing in the street, stilt walkers, hoola hoops for all and a fire show.

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“The first year, I painted 24 hours straight,” said Blanco, “and last year I painted for 23.” The marathon began at 10 a.m. Saturday morning and ended 24 hours later on Sunday. “If I tried to sleep I would just end up thinking about it,” said Blanco.

All of the 2017 artists stopped at some point during the night, except Blanco. Most knocked off work by about midnight or shortly thereafter and returned around 8 a.m. to finish up.

Even still, even painting more hours than anyone else, FRC’s Blanco acknowledged the challenge of the time constraint. “I can’t work miracles,” he said at hour 21 as his surrender began to creep in. The watching public seemed to disagree and could be heard making comments as they passed by such as, “Oh my gosh, that’s amazing” and “Are they going to vote? Because this guy is obviously killing it,” and even, “Wow, look at that. This guy’s a miracle worker.”

A banner hung on the scaffolding Blanco used to continuously climb up and down to reach all corners of the art piece. It gave artist credit to “Feather River Art Program.”

Although painting alone in the wee hours, Blanco had a whole crew of relatives on hand who supported his efforts in the heat of the day, late into the night and very early in the morning. They gathered directly in front of Blanco’s work-in-progress.

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Rafael Blanco continues working on the details of his 24-hour mural creation as he paints alone through the night.
Photo by Mari Erin Roth

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Perched under a shade canopy on stools and fold-up camping chairs, a nephew took time-lapse pictures while family members remained ready with food and beverages to keep the artist going. The youngest supporter was six-week old Teo Blanco cradled by Rafael’s dedicated and heat-enduring wife, Yascara.

Two hours after Sunday’s 10 a.m. announcement, “brushes down,” cash awards were handed out in front of a large crowd gathered to hear the judge’s choices. FRC’s Blanco was given a \$1,000 prize and presented with second-place honors once again. Truly, number two tried harder.

The seven marathon murals will remain viewable from North Virginia Street, near



Rafael Blanco, right, stands with his family of supporters after receiving a cash award July 16 at the completion of the fourth annual 24-hour mural marathon. The artwork will remain on the exterior walls of Circus Circus facing Virginia Street in downtown Reno for the entire year. Photo submitted



A train-themed mural by Rafael Blanco decorates downtown Yuba City. This mural was finished just a few days before Blanco tackled the 24-hour mural marathon in Reno. Photo by Mari Erin Roth



The mural created primarily with spray paint by Anthony Ortega is the judge's selection for first place. More of Ortega's art is viewable at anthony.n.ortega@eqld_creations. Photo by Mari Erin Roth

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2 thoughts on "Local artist places second in 24-hour mural marathon"

👤 Mural Routes

📅 August 2, 2017 at 7:43 am

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Excellent work!

👤 Darla DeRuiter

📅 August 3, 2017 at 3:34 pm

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Feather River College is so privileged to have Rafael as the head of our Art Department! He is not only an amazing and inspiring artist, he is an outstanding teacher! Congratulations Rafael! Go for first!

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