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Mural memorializes 9/11 attacks

By Emanuel Parker
Staff Writer

PASADENA – Like millions worldwide, artist Milo Reice watched his TV in horror as the World Trade Center collapsed Sept. 11. Weeks later the former Manhattan resident, who now lives in Altadena, put his emotions on canvas.

The result is on display at the Pasadena City College Art Gallery.

"September 11, 2001: A Triptych in Memoriam -- The Rubble, The Hope, The Watching," is three canvas panels in charcoal, pastel, gesso and oil, almost 20 feet long and six feet high.

"I grew up in Manhattan and watched those buildings being built and have been in and out of them many, many times," said Reice, 49. "So this was automatic, not a conscious decision. One day I just woke up and I was on a canvas working on this."

Reice, PCC's 16th artist in residence, created the work during his week in the post.

"The Rubble" shows rescue workers at the top of the painting saving lives; but most of the work is a dark, chaotic jumble of broken objects, including body parts

In the panel's center is a small hole. In the hole is a plastic bag containing plaster fresco

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Milo Reice, artist and former Manhattan resident

fragments from Pompeii that Reice admits he swiped when he was 14 and in Italy studying art.

"I just felt it bridged the gap of 2,000 years of grief. When I did the painting ... I thought, 'My God, this is perfect placement.' (Sept. 11) ultimately is just another horrible disaster.

"I thought there was something touching and poetically metaphorical about placing (the fresco fragments) there. And it also assuages my guilt about stealing it years ago," he said, laughing.

"The Hope" shows two men and a woman, the men manipulating blocks and the woman looking out a window as the sun shines on a

distant New York skyline.

Reice said, "... it's later in the day, or months later, when the sun is rising over the city and we're a little optimistic that some day we'll pull things together."

"The Watching" shows four people and the anguish, fear and terror they feel as they watch the events of Sept. 11 unfold on television.

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Completing the triptych took an emotional toll and Reice said the work is not for sale.

"If someone came up to me tomorrow and said, 'Here's X amount of dollars,' I wouldn't want to take it. I'd feel strange getting money for a painting that is essentially something I did to try and heal," Reice said. "What I really want to do is find a museum ... and give it to them as a gift. That would make me feel good."

He and his wife moved to Los Angeles eight years ago and to Altadena eight months ago.

"I love it and I'm just very happy here. I have a beautiful studio. I took a pool house and converted it to a studio. When it's summer and very hot, I jump into the pool every 10 minutes. We have a wonderful compound and the best studio I've ever had, and I have no complaints."