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ARTS

Open installation at the BMA

New artworks around the museum pull the public in as part of the Free Fall Baltimore program

By **BROOKE NEVILS**
SUN REPORTER

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The feathers on either side of the steps are what keep catching my eye," said Sherron Bryant of Owings Mills on Sunday, listening to the Harbor Knights Youth Steel Orchestra as she sat with her friends and family at the **Baltimore Museum of Art's** ArtBlast event.

Irene Howland and Carol Nee of Timonium were also curious about the feathered waterfalls on either side of the Pope building terrace -- especially when they learned that the feathers were water-filled surgical gloves, selected by artist Anna McDonald to expand and contract like a living organism as the temperature and daylight changes.

"We'll have to go back and touch them, then," Howland said.

McDonald's piece is one of 11 new installations forming an arc around the BMA, beginning with James Vose's metal sculpture clamping together two columns on the building's west side and extending into the sculpture garden, where the Lexie Mountain Boys regularly create a human pyramid and museum visitors can listen to a cell phone tour.

"This is a very different kind of BMA

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project," said Darcy Alexander, the exhibit's curator. "The openness of the museum and its new free status gives us an opportunity to think more about the notion of public, to broaden our programs and find new ways to communicate with those audiences who may be coming to the museum because it's free."

ArtBlast was the inaugural event of siteMaryland, the Governor's Arts Initiative, in which a juried exhibition of artists living or working in Maryland will change venues every year. The celebration coincided with the beginning of indefinite free admission to the BMA as part of Free Fall Baltimore, which kicked off Oct. 1 and includes free arts events all over the city.

"I think it's great," Bryant said. "We've been to the BMA numerous times, but we'll definitely be coming more now that it's free. Even with \$10 admission, when you bring the whole family, that still gets expensive. It should always be like this."

"The impetus behind Free Fall Baltimore is about making our collections even more public than they already are, so it seemed really appropriate that we would bring the public into an open installation that is inherently public," Alexander said. "It's been a great opportunity to showcase work by regional artists."

For McDonald, the artist behind the cascades of surgical gloves, ArtBlast was an opportunity to give back to the city.

"Baltimore has really changed me," McDonald said. "Not a day has gone by since I moved here two years ago that my heart didn't get pulled out of my chest. My work here extends the invitation for others to communicate with each other the uncommunicable -- to play and touch in a city where there are a lot of lines drawn in the sand. I wanted to create something that was exploding from the building, seeping out and reaching to the public."

"All the work has an inherent ephemerality to it, as much public art does," Alexander said. But as she passed Vose's metal sculpture, she continued, "It's just beautiful. I'm kind of hoping he'll leave it here."

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*siteMaryland: Governor's Arts Initiative 2006 closes tonight with a celebration during Free First Thursday Night's extended evening hours 5 p.m.-9 p.m. at the **Baltimore Museum of Art**, 10 Art Museum Drive. Free admission continues year-round. For more information, go to artbma.org or call 443-573-1870.*

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