Rose Art Museum Opening
2013, 5,000 Feet is the Best

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In preparation for the Rose Art Museum’s fall opening reception last Tuesday, the fine arts community on campus has been eagerly anticipating the new exhibitions and the special events that accompany them. From classrooms to bulletin boards, club meetings to email announcements, it’s been hard to go far on campus this semester without hearing the name of one of the five artists whose exhibitions just opened. Take, for example, Israeli-born, American-educated film and installation artist Omer Fast—his film project installation, *5000 Feet Is The Best*, is one of the five new exhibitions and the first of a series of video art to be exhibited at the Rose. The artist kicked off last Tuesday’s events by giving a talk about his work immediately preceding the museum’s opening reception.

Fast’s talk quickly packed the Edie and Lew Wasserman Cinematheque by its scheduled start time of 4 p.m., attended largely by students of Fine Arts classes. Christopher Bedford, the Henry and Lois Foster Director of the Rose Art Museum, gracefully introduced Fast, whose laid-back, personable disposition put the audience at ease as he began to speak. Bedford has
organized two of Fast's previous solo exhibits.

For the past 12 years, Fast has been using video as a medium to comment on current events, producing works that are both politically and emotionally charged. After earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Tufts University and a Master of Fine Arts at Hunter College, Fast first embarked on unsuccessful and amateurish attempts at video projects, he told the audience with a laugh.

He reminisced about taking a trip to the small town of Glendive, Mont., using a school travel grant, with the intention of buying television advertisement airtime to show his art to a captive audience. He was denied the airtime by the small-town cable company, and went on to show what he produced instead during his time in Glendive: an approximately 12 minute long video showing each of the 5,000 homes in the town at the time. Fast then showed the audience another short video—of him, making the sounds of wind, barking dogs, cars whizzing by into a microphone—that comprised the audio track of the Glendive video. At the time of filming, he wasn't aware that he hadn't turned the camera's sound on, so he creatively provided his own audio.

Though the style Fast uses in his videos evokes the realist, first-person point of view style that is characteristic of documentary films, he contests the stylistic designation: “I don't think of myself as a documentarian, but I do rely on the document ... to give a sense of the real.” Fast began to talk about how he first started manipulating bits of filmed conversations to compile a narrative that was, as it was shown to the viewer, very different from what actually happened— but the seamless integration of multiple film bits into one work led to a radically different final story.

The work 5000 Feet Is The Best uses this style of film integration to establish a narrative around a conversation that Fast had with a man who worked as a U.S. Air Force Predator drone operator, whose job was, literally, to watch the damage of Predator drones and determine the best method of placement for the drones so as to maximize their potential to harm. Playing on loop at the Mildred S. Lee Gallery in the Rose, 5000 Feet Is The Best bombards viewers with a story whose conclusion is unfathomable. “In 5000 Feet,” Fast said at his artist talk, “we're presented with something that is not completely understood.... There is no closure for this particular person, and there is none for us as viewers.”

Often, with film and video installations, museum goers tend to walk in and out of a viewing area. But in the case of Fast's installation in the Rose, viewers are drawn in and the piece demands attention. The filmed conversations Fast conducted with his subject are spliced by dramatic reenactments of the traumatic events that the man discusses.

Perhaps the success of the 30-minute video is that it is one that viewers cannot simply walk away from. It works toward what Fast calls “a poetic truth, a resonance.” He said reverently, toward the conclusion of his talk, that “in its best moments, art can do that.”