

Cherry and Martin

Means, Sean P. "Mixing New Art of Brian Bress with Classics at UMFA," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, September 17th, 2015

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When [Brian Bress](#) explains to people that he's an artist, the conversation is both simple and complex.

"I often tell people that I make collages and costumes and props," Bress said.

Those physical objects, however, are usually nowhere to be found when his finished works are shown. Instead, they are seen on TV screens, part of his looping video installations.

"Video is the container that holds all of those things," Bress said.

The exhibit "[Brian Bress: Make Your Own Friends](#)," opening Friday at the [Utah Museum of Fine Arts](#), showcases Bress' work over the past 10 years — not only the videos, but also the objects he uses to create them.

"It's like I'm getting to see my old friends getting back together again," Bress said Thursday at a press preview of the exhibit.

Whitney Tassie, curator of modern and contemporary art at UMFA, noticed Bress' work in 2007 and spent an entire Saturday watching works he had posted on YouTube. "I fell in love, hard," she said.

When Tassie took the job at UMFA three years ago, she thought Bress would be perfect for the museum's "Salt" installation series showcasing contemporary artists. She didn't want to confine his work to one gallery room, but rather interact with the items in UMFA's permanent galleries.

"It was so obvious I had to get Brian here and get him to do an intervention in our collection," she said.

The problem was that Tassie wasn't the only curator courting the L.A. artist. Another was Nora Burnett Abrams, curator at the [Museum of Contemporary Art Denver](#) (also known as MCA Denver).

Rather than attempt competing exhibits at two Intermountain West museums, Tassie contacted Abrams about collaborating. Now, the exhibit will be on display at UMFA through Jan. 10, then move to MCA Denver — and, possibly, farm out to other museums after that.

The collaboration has had its challenges, such as getting 14 art collectors to lend Bress' work or figuring out how to hide the power cords for the self-contained TV screens. Another factor that interrupted planning of the exhibit: Bress, Tassie and Abrams all became new parents in the past six months.

While some of Bress' video installations are in the Salt Gallery, others are placed in contrast to works in UMFA's permanent collections. The juxtapositions are fascinating.

For example: a video screen showing "Cowboy," in which Bress in a white-on-white cowboy costume draws on a Plexiglas screen with a dry-erase marker, faces Utah landscapes and a Frederick Remington sculpture. A screen for Bress' "Whitewalker 2," a loop of the artist walking on a treadmill in a body suit made of beaded curtains, stands alongside ceremonial Pacific Islander garb that is remarkably similar in its fringe effect.

Mixing Bress' art with these classic works is amazing for the artist, and a little humbling. "I understand I am one drop in the great ocean of art," he said.