

DO NO HARM VS Step Up
Curated By: Jacqueline Ehlis
02/07

Derek Franklin
Matthew Green
Catherine Hood
Collin Janke
Mamie Korpela
Iana LN Amauba
Suzanne Malitz
Rose McComick
Mack McFarland
Kim McKenna
Erin Patterson
Rebecca Shelly
Kristina DiTullo

In *Do No Harm VS Step Up*, Jacqueline Ehlis looks at art as both diaristic, doodles, and crafty traces that place the artist in the role of a *Do No Harm* spectator versus art as a unique cultural manifestation, regionally based and authentic, which makes the artist assert a *Step Up* role in the art community. Thinking of the gallery as an arena for both the spectator and participant, it will be organized in a fashion allowing the *Step Up* art work to cross-act with one another, while the plethora of *Do No Harm* work will hang salon style observing these encounters. In one of the *Step Up* interactions, Suzanne Malitz goes one on one with Matthew Green. Malitz's, Gothic Drawing, gouache and watercolor on paper, faces Green's, Edgeplay One, a digital print, collage done from Google image searches. Both artists are interested in involving a mix of visual language and free association of words to create dissonance, ambiguity and to grab the gaze, but regardless, the genesis of their interaction is inherently combative.

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Divide Entices Interaction

by Brian Libby

The Oregonian

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New American Art Union owner Ruth Ann Brown has embraced the group show, but with a twist.

She's invited five established Portland-area artists to curate shows in 2007 focusing on new talent. "Do No Harm vs. Step Up," the debut exhibit curated by Jacqueline Ehlis via an open call, features almost exclusively artists whom neither Ehlis nor Brown knew or had heard of beforehand. But many of the works demonstrate just how many young Portland artists are out there waiting for a chance to show off their talents.

Ehlis separates the group show in two. In the back of the gallery are the "Do No Harm" works, which are hung salon-style (bunched together) and are more personal, less ambiguous pieces. Facing each other on two front walls are the "Step Up" works, which largely are more minimal and abstract, but often playfully so. The idea, Ehlis says, is for the "Step Up" works to prompt interaction -- both with the audience and with each other -- while the "Do No Harm" works function as observers, mirroring society's activists and silent

The division encourages audience interaction, but sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between the two groups. The "Do No Harm" pieces often exhibit a frank political nature that the supposedly more provocative camp doesn't necessarily have. And in two cases, each section has similar works by the same artist. But the curator seems to welcome these ambiguities and contradictions. "I was thinking of the gallery as an arena," Ehlis says.

The "Do No Harm" section is anchored by Kim McKenna's large oil-on-canvas painting "Concorde." Resembling Gerhart Richter's "Phantom Interceptor" from 1964, it portrays the now-retired supersonic passenger jet with colorful, expressive awe. But McKenna additionally inserts into the frame -- much like the picture-in-a-picture window on a TV -- a cluster of small rooms with chairs and a sofa. The juxtaposition renders the spectacle of the Concorde's fiery takeoff as an absurdity.

Similarly, another painting by McKenna called "Lounge" portrays a luxurious home, complete with Matisse painting and Mies van der Rohe-designed Barcelona daybed in the foreground. Visible through the house's floor-to-ceiling window is a massive, ominous cloud of smoke, like the Los Angeles riots seen from a Case Study House.

Hung simply, without framing, the twin watercolor paintings making up Rebecca Shelly's superb "Labor Day in the Gorge" portray in white silhouette a smattering of tourists dwarfed by a vast brown mass of subtly transforming hues and shades. In the middle a crevice of light casts a striking, godlike presence.

The "Step Up" section features numerous minimalist works by Derek Franklin. A trio of square-shaped white paper prints over steel have been stenciled with innocuous phrases: "Rabbit Drawing," "Cute Pink Doodle" and "Andy Warhol Faker." Minimalism is usually austere but these works are fun. Franklin's wall-mounted "Santa Monica Pier" resembles coffee mugs hanging over a checkerboard. Yet it's not corny because Franklin's style embodies critic Clement Greenberg's definition of minimalism as a reduction to surface and materials.

One of the artists with pieces in both halves of the exhibition, Catherine Hood, is 17 years old (Ehlis taught her at Portland Community College). Displayed wrapped around a wall in the "Step Up" section, Hood's "Migration" is a latex and acrylic painting on a rough, massive unstretched canvas. The abstract cluster of painted zigzagging angles and curves feel like tectonic plates shifting and colliding at breakneck pace.

Group shows can be difficult to pull off. If one simply chooses the best pieces, they might not go together well or share any larger sense of meaning. If too concept-focused, the curator risks leaving out superior artwork. Ehlis takes an ambitious turn by splitting the works as a commentary on art's role in its own community and the larger society. Ultimately one can take or leave that invitation because Ehlis has done her initial job well: She's chosen many gems by lesser known artists. Besides, the real debate may be over which of these lesser known artists seizes the spotlight in the future.

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