

**invisible.other**  
**Curated By: TJ Norris**  
04/07

Ted Apel  
Daniel Barron  
Richard Chartier  
Leif Elggren  
Ty Ennis  
Melia Donovan  
Thomas Köner  
Michael Paulus  
Susan Robb  
Steve Roden  
Abi Spring  
Laura Vandenburg

invisible.other risks asking a set of questions. As an inferred sub theme, rather than the adoption of a more literal construct, the formality of its conceptual prowess is fairly delicate. What is a blank stare? Does it simply exist in space as a flat tonal value - or is it a gesture of ambiguity strictly meant to titillate? The viewer is welcomed to observe the impression of a faded glance, navigate between the peripheral nature of shadows and reflections, challenged to find a parallel universe. The layers are potentially endless. Often these semblances are purported in the subtle gesture of mark making and/or in the faint overture of erasure.

The work included here incorporates an array of such observations. They question varying and obtuse layers, which vacillate in a state between implicit reasoning and the exploration of a world of invisible, temporal associations.

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Subtle Arts, Subtle Effects  
by Rachel Neugarten  
The Oregonian  
April 13 2007

This month at the New American Art Union, you'll have to use your ears as much as your eyes to experience "invisible.other," TJ Norris' latest group-curated show.

One wall drawing, for example, is made of nearly imperceptible pinholes; a pencil drawing has been covered with white paint; and a sound installation is in fact not meant to be seen.

The works by 12 Northwest and international artists -- including Portlanders Ty Ennis, Melia Donovan and Abi Spring, Springfield-based Laura Vandenburg, Seattle's Susan Robb, Thomas Koner from Berlin and Sweden's Leif Elggren -- argue many things. They ask viewers to explore the nature of seeing, or just as often, the nature of being unable to see. The exhibit also affirms an increasingly cool, even sterile, aesthetic by Norris, a multimedia artist who has become a noteworthy presenter of emerging talent.

Artists often are accused of being intentionally obscure. Curators can be guilty of that sin, too. Advice to viewers of this show: Don't read Norris' curating statement, almost all of which reads like purposefully inscrutable rhetoric.

That's a shame because many of the artists in this show are working in the tradition of minimalism and conceptual art, movements that pushed the formal boundaries and definitions of art. Those movements also inspired a great deal of cynicism for their emphasis on abstract ideas, not the art object.

Like almost all of Norris' previous work as both curator and artist, "invisible.other" is a big bear hug to the ephemeral, albeit a thoughtful expression of that quality. As the title suggests, Norris is interested in exploring how people see art, so he's selected works that are so indirect as to virtually disappear or, in some instances, remain invisible to the eye.

The best example might be Melia Donovan's "Frostie Freeze," a work so subtle you'll have to hunt for it. Donovan has punched tiny holes into the surface of one of the gallery's walls, etching out a scene of customers at an ice-cream stand. The whole piece is below waist level; many gallery-goers the night of the opening walked right past it. Here, Donovan has interpreted the theme of invisibility literally, composing a visual arts parallel to musician John Cage's infamous "4'33" -- his 41/2-minute work of silence.

Richard Chartier similarly plays with the notion of visibility, and the drawn image, with his three drawings. "Reference 1, 2, 3" consists of pencil drawings that were erased and then painted over in white acrylic. Even after being erased vigorously, tiny vestiges of the initial marks are still visible. Some artworks, after all, are hard to get rid of.

A far more sincere and formal counterpoint is Abi Spring's painting, "Wet," which depicts evanescent yellow-white strands, on a lavender-white backdrop. The high-process painting has the luminous, veined quality of ivory or pale skin.

Each of these works implores the viewer to step closer and to adjust the eyes. Some, however, ask the viewer to listen closely and tap the ears.

In "One stone / and Arcs and Ears," Steve Roden offers a sonic analogue to Donovan's and Chartier's works. He's removed the human voices from the soundtrack of Robert Bresson's film, "Proces de Jeanne d'Arc," replacing the dialogue with the sound of footsteps, ambient music and the crackling of the record itself. Like Donovan's drawing, Roden's piece conjures the random philosophy of Cage's music, a philosophy that found kinship in the equally chance-based choreography of Cage's partner, Merce Cunningham.

One of the show's most impressive works is Michael Paulus' "Tabernacle," a black cabinet with a frosted-glass front. Inside the cabinet, a light glows, illuminating a vague pink form that, like the suitcase from "Pulp Fiction," inspires curiosity. The cabinet is slightly ajar, thus allowing viewers a peek: The pink form resembles a sacred relic, maybe an enclosed heart.

As Paulus' cabinet glows, in another part of the gallery, light bulbs flash and click. That's Ted Apel's "Potential Difference," another conceptual work that's a metaphor for creative collaboration. In this work that features photographs and written descriptions of Pierre Curie and Thomas Edison -- both of whom contributed to the discovery and application of electricity -- some light bulbs flash while others emit soft clicks. The clicks are determined by the luminosity of the flashing bulbs.

Obviously, there's much more to this show than this space allows. But one important thing: As in his previously curated show, last June's "Grey/Area," Norris is ultimately using the individual works to produce an atmosphere and state an aesthetic -- a cool, sterile, minimalist atmosphere. In a way, the entire show is really one big installation, parts of which can be seen, and parts of which can't.

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