

Rose McCormick's "Grande Ronde" at NAAU
By Jeff Jahn
PORT
www.portlandart.net
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Historically reflection pools have been the province of memorials like the Taj Mahal, Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, and the Oklahoma City Memorial, etc... all have a solemn shrine like aspect that encourages visitors to personalize and empathize amongst other more imposing and idiosyncratic edifices in their immediate environs. In a very real sense as well as philosophically, these pools brings far away objects into closer more temporally present view.

Like this exhibition, those structures are all inherently existential and imbued with a sense of history, but instead of civic level grandiosity Grande Ronde acts as kind of personal shrine to McCormick's own shifting and inherently subjective art practice. Notably, it invites viewers to explore, but equally wonderfully doesn't require them at all to operate as a piece. How the viewer comes to it or not is not the artist's concern and it's where this work seems more mature than some couture shows which tried too hard to manage or prompt viewers.

That's partially why Rose McCormick's *Grande Ronde* marks a strong conclusion to NAAU's Couture Series. By replacing her more specific canvases with a patiently insistent reflection pool it becomes a form of institutional critique (more of a comment here really) of the white gallery space she's shown and painted in as a studio.

It also gives viewers a personal entry into McCormick's painting practice more fully than her painting performances as the painterly gray concrete overlay becomes the stretcher bar frame and the water the inexhaustible, inviolate and relentlessly existential tabula rasa... essentially a way to share that anxious painterly moment of beginning (or ending) without having to push imagery on the viewer. It is one of the great gifts of installation art and architecture to be able to act as environment rather than an object.... To provide context and not the focal point is liberating for both artist and viewer.

In fact, it's a complete and shocking departure for McCormick who up until now has been a talented, extremely curious but somewhat reticent painter of symbols, philosophically evidenced when her previous show presented herself as an installation of a painter painting... ultimately emphasizing the process over the finished painting as products. It isn't surprising that since that effort, she's been increasingly influenced by John Cage and Eric Satie's investigations into the process based intensification of time-based experiences, something which translates from music to subtle installation art quite well.

As a conduit of temporal subjectivity Grande Ronde consists of a gallery sized reflecting pool, a tidy pile of blankets, a scrapbook, an antique fan, a video of the artist's statement and several old suitcases. The pool's surface, being subtly influenced by the fan, outdoor breezes and viewer's activity, creates an entirely existential feedback loop... one where the viewer is part of the system (but not necessary by any means). I call this the guest experience, where the viewer enjoys the hospitality of the space.

Similarly, the pool is easily navigated by viewers but the scrap book, blankets, suitcases and fan all create minor obstructions as differentiating reference points... like talking points at a meeting, the Stations of the Cross or stops along some interpretive nature trail.

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I particularly liked how the fan activated wave reflections from the pool which are thrown across the far wall, where McCormick had previously installed herself some years before. This surface agitation prompted me to think of the act of art making as a way to create waves or ripples in the death like stillness that water will revert to without such stimulation. Thus, McCormick seems to have developed a way to produce action without performing as an artist, a major personal breakthrough that most artists can't "let go" enough to achieve. They have trouble letting go of the overinflated sense of self importance in the interpretation/understanding of the work... In any case, I don't sense any of that cling here and Rose seems to have stepped aside.

Still, McCormick's own scrapbook firmly inserts the artist's own artistic history into the viewers experience... making this more like visiting a specific monk's ascetic shrine (in this case McCormick's) than a more neutral art piece like Judd's Artillery sheds or a Robert Irwin piece. The suitcases, fan, blankets and even the painterly grey rim of the pool are all part of McCormick's signature aesthetics... whereas Judd and Irwin take pains to neutralize any signature. In fact the concrete edge of the pool bear an uncanny resemblance to her brushstrokes.

Instead, McCormick's painterly reluctance (to be or not be a painter) has bourn a more complete repudiation of the idea of "finished work" as Grande Ronde is sort of invitation for temporal self examination as an experience. Instead of paintings or production of them, now the subject is the production of "contemplation", rather than a painter's typical finished "production" as subject of contemplation. Artists like Donald Judd and Robert Irwin have been down this road before but in many ways Grande Ronde has more to do with Beuys (the blankets), Richard Long (the path around the pool) and Walter de Maria (the elemental gallery filling pool) who all traffic in an almost shamanistic personal subjectivity as an environmental engagement.

Walter De Maria's One Sun / 34 Moons at the Nelson-Akins Museum (lights in the pool are portholes to galleries)

Overall, Its stripped down and room filling intensity most calls to mind, Walter De Maria whose work is less about objects than the siting of the contemplative viewer in a vast ordered field in one's immediate environment. Works like the Earth Room (similar with its elemental intervention), Broken Kilometer, the Lightning Fields, Seen Unseen Known/ Unknown and the Las Vegas Piece (in particular) are all about pilgrimage and physically negotiation of space, which then ultimately becomes an awareness of self in that environment. McCormick's blankets even remind me of those at the lightning field, though hers are monogammed "RM".

Are reflecting pools very original? No, but I don't think that's the point here, it's the luxury of taking the time to feel time washing over you and I suspect McCormick will have opportunities to pursue these ideas outdoors and in a more public space in the future. Her dealer is involved in real-estate development herself after all.

After thumbing through the scrapbook atop the blankets, and walking the path I contemplated the space in a familiar, not new ways. NAAU is a space where I have spent a great deal of time and even shown myself... and every single time the large front window has been the focal point of activity. This time was no different, but the late August's summer day had its own particular charm and like John Cage's 4'33"... it isn't the silence, but the unintentional sounds and scenes that inhabit the void (that isn't a void) presented here.

It's a rather successful piece and upon viewing Grande Ronde, I felt a deep sense of nostalgia for something that had passed only minutes ago... yet it was also part of a continuum... as if like every visit to the gallery had been part of a daily walk, impressive for something I've only known for a few days.

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Ty Ennis: Portland, OR
By John Motley
Art Papers
September / October, 2009

Thus far, Ty Ennis' work has narrowly focused on the precarious transition from youth to adulthood, mapping all the messy feelings that seem to straddle adolescence and maturity, but belonging to neither. Formally, it has run parallel to that reticent journey into the unknown: his small-scale ink and graphite figure drawings, though stunningly executed, often employ such faint and delicate mark-making that the surround white space threatens to swallow them up. Illustrations of ghostly figures partially submerged in water, a spilled can of Hamm's beer, eerily secluded woodland scenes—all his subjects radiate fated resignation, reminding us that all things lead, inevitably, toward disappearance. As such, his work has always registered as a deeply personal investigation, often wringing revelatory results out of indulgent introspection. Through the exhibition *You'll Love It Here: The Lilac City Track Murders '96-'98* is still very much rooted in Ennis' negotiations with memory and personal history, those preoccupations are now sublimated as a meditation on serial killer Robert Lee Yates, Jr., who terrorized the city of Spokane, WA, while the artist attended high school [New American Art Union; July 3-August 16, 2009].

The details of the murders are familiarly grisly: Yates, an unremarkable father of five and Army helicopter pilot, murdered ten women in Spokane County—and more statewide—preying on prostitutes, drug addicts, and other vulnerable targets. These details may seem so familiar because, as Ennis points out in an accompanying text in which public and private history comfortably mingle, the Pacific Northwest has been host to more serial killers than any other region the United States. But *You'll Love It Here* doesn't exploit the salacious drama of the murders themselves. Instead, it uses the as a spectral backdrop, which charges the show's largely benign imagery with sinister potential. For example, along on e wall, the artist has arranged dozens of postcard-sized snapshots from his native Spokane. The images present a collection of nondescript anywheres rather than the tourist destination implied by the exhibition's title or the city's optimistic tourism slogan: parking lots blanched in the sun, motels, sprawl. However, as a taxidermy coyote perches high in a corner of the gallery, these images can be seen as potential sites of violence, waiting to be activated by a kill. That is, while they themselves betray no signs of the horror that ostensibly occurred there, the images nonetheless acknowledge a paranoid possibility. In the shadow of the murders, they not only suggest that unspeakable abjection could lurk beneath every surface, but confirm that it almost certainly does. From there, it only takes a small leap to realize that the viewer himself, corralled within the gallery's boundaries, is sutured into the role of prey, unwaveringly surveyed by the couching coyote.

Directly cross the gallery from the photographs, Ennis presents a group of portraits of the victims. Rendered in a drab, inky monochrome, their faces are dim and smudged, their eyes nearly invisible. The blurring that marks their countenances loosely conjures Gerhard Richter's *Eight Student Nurses*, 1966, as well as his *October 18, 1977* series, 1988. But compared to Richter's paintings, Ennis' brushwork is whisper-silent and murdered women's faces closer to erasure than distortion. This effect seems to plunge this subjects even further into obscurity, reminding us that our cultural memory of victims often cruelly pales in contrast to that of their killers. In their evasive, ephemeral execution, these portraits trace a clear line to the artist's previous work, casting one's passage into adulthood as an analogy for the community of Spokane's own descent into fearful uncertainty and restaging all that interior drama in the physical spaces of America's so-called killing fields.

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Chemicals and Romance Mix in Video Installation
By Chas Bowie
The Oregonian
31 May, 2009

Singer Jello Biafra's manic yawp floods the gallery with staccato punches of "Yellow air, yellow clouds / Blowin' down down down the fairway," as the band blisters through "Chemical Warfare." For a skatepunk in South Charleston, West Virginia during the mid-1980s, this speedball of a revolt anthem must have felt like nothing less than a personal revolution.

"Shelter in Place," Slappe's semi-autobiographical ode to punk rebellion and teen tenderness, unfolds in the two South Charleston teens' bedrooms, which are projected onto opposite walls of the gallery. A topographic floor sculpture of the local river valley, illuminated by a third video projector, separates their messy dens and provides a detached view of the terrain.

The videos begin with a satellite floating through space, quickly followed by a dense pastiche of Ronald Reagan speeches and reports on his "Star Wars" anti-missile system. As Reagan promises to protect us from evil and barbarism with space-based X-ray lasers, the footage shifts to Bhopal, India, where the leak of toxic gases from a Union Carbide chemical plant killed as many as 10,000 residents in 1984.

Widely regarded as the worst industrial disaster in history, the catastrophe loomed especially large for Slappe and other South Charlestonians, whose hometown was anchored by a massive Union Carbide chemical plant. Just three months later, the unthinkable happened: The local plant leaked 5,700 pounds of potentially lethal fumes. Between deadly gases and nukes falling from space, Slappe's West Virginia valley was blanketed in invisible threats, both real and imaginary.

Back onscreen, we see the teen boy's room for the first time, as a barrage of newscasts about the chemical disasters blare from his TV set. The horrific reports and air-raid sirens fill the gallery with panicky chaos until the boy drops the needle on his Dead Kennedys album.

At this point, the political becomes personal, and "Shelter in Place" focuses on the adolescents' cross-town love story. Their rooms and their lives are filled with punk zines, cult films, Voivod albums, and, like all teens, telephone time.

They don't talk on the phone, so much as they "teleport" scraps of underground culture to one another. He holds the receiver up to a Youth Brigade concert video and it materializes on her TV; she reciprocates with a copy of Flip Side magazine and a scene from "Repo Man." They do more than just bond over Bones Brigade stickers and studded black denim, though. These cultural artifacts provide lifelines to the outside world, evidence of exciting activities beyond the Kanawha Valley floor.

Slappe successfully avoids romanticizing the duo or casting them as overly-cool antiheroes. Like all teens, they're victims of geography, parents, and hormones: The boy fantasizes about moshing like the punks on his video, but reality finds him planted inches from the TV screen, barely nodding along. The girls' room is littered with accoutrements of the counterculture, but they coexist with remnants of a not-too-distant childhood -- bright yellow bookcases and doll-shaped lamps, replete with frilly dresses.

"Shelter in Place" watches the yearning teens cast about for meaning and identity without judging them, allowing them space to find themselves -- and each other -- as we witness in the piece's surprising and wonderful third act. Just as global threats and biochemical disasters move through invisible channels, so, too, we are reminded, do dreams, human voices, and -- ultimately -- love.

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Vanessa Renwick's "House of Sound"

By Brian Libby

The Oregonian

3 April, 2009

At first glance, Vanessa Renwick's installation "The House of Sound" could be mistaken for a hipster bachelor pad. The dark gallery space is lighted only by an orange glow from two table lamps seemingly rescued from a Nixon-era Holiday Inn. A weathered corduroy love seat and vinyl sofa sit on shag carpet beside a record player spinning soul and R&B albums from the 1960s and '70s.

The exhibit, at New American Art Union, also is entertainingly interactive. Sitting on the sofas and playing records is encouraged. Yet Renwick's exhibit is born of a deeper, more earnest desire: to preserve the history of a long gone but still beloved North Portland record store.

The House of Sound was opened in 1964 on Williams Avenue by former Pro Football Hall of Famer Mel Renfro, a graduate of nearby Jefferson High School. Prospering into the late 1970s --an era still decades away from iTunes and the ease of accessing music online --the store was a treasure trove of hard-to-find artists. For all the memorable Motown songs that became chart-toppers in the period, countless soul and R&B acts never received radio play. As a result, the House of Sound became a trusted source to learn about such artists as Abner Jay, Archie Bell & the Drells, Wilson Pickett and the Whispers. Albums by these artists are part of Renwick's interactive exhibit and were provided by Mississippi Records.

The "living room" portion of the installation not only evokes an average home where records from the House of Sound might have been listened to, but also provides a setting to watch Renwick's accompanying film about the store; it's actually intended to be the center of what's officially a video installation. Sober, sepia-toned footage of the present-day site of the store --now a vacant lot encircled by chain-link fence --is paired with audio from a KBOO radio interview with two former House of Sound employees.

Another highlight, placed a few feet from the comfy sofas and record player, is the store's original sign. Showing the patina of age, it feels halfway between scrap-pile salvage and a Pop Art sculpture. Creating a kind of secular rite for the store, Renwick surrounded the old metal sign with several tea light candles on the floor and a canister of matches for guests to use.

This is the latest in New American Art Union's "Couture" series, in which gallery owner Ruth Ann Brown has provided artist stipends for 10 exhibits, free from concern about sales. Renwick's work has shown at galleries, clubs and museums all over the nation and Europe, including the Portland Art Museum's 2006 Oregon Biennial. She is one of the city's most venerated and iconoclastic filmmakers, having portrayed in more than 20 films everything from nude bicyclists ("The Yodeling Lesson") and gray wolves ("Critter") to poetic portraits of now-gone local landmarks ("Portrait #2: Trojan") and biographies of cantankerous fellow outsider artists ("Richart"). This is actually Renwick's first solo exhibit at a Portland gallery (she's represented by PDX Contemporary Art).

Some of Renwick's past work has had a bit of a hobolike quirkiness, but at its best, her career is about remembering the cultural history woven into the urban and rural fabric, places and personal stories we're likely to miss once they're gone. As it happens, "The House of Sound" is not just a one-time exhibit but an ongoing project. Renwick's rust-tinged vision isn't one of fanciful escape or wish fulfillment, but the poignancy of fleeting but memorable environments and lives.

Given the natural nostalgia people have for the House of Sound, this exhibit could easily have felt too sentimental. Instead, though Renwick shows unmistakable reverence, her hand is relatively light in laying out the exhibit.

A purist might argue that this is hardly art at all, just a documentary film screening with a comfy set of seats and a stereo. But such labels don't matter when sitting on the sofa watching the turntable spin in the lamplight, seeing the candles flicker before the store's old sign and listening to the authentic voices from the House of Sound tell the record store's story.

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ML Guth Interviews Laura Fritz
PORT
www.portlandart.net
February 14th, 2009

MK Guth: I wanted to start with the basics like, what is your background? What brought you to art? Where did you go to school? Where was your area of focus and does that connect to how you are making work now?

Laura Fritz: Well, I grew up in the Chicago area and I started out being really interested in lights in darkened rooms. They fascinated me. Sometime between Preschool and Kindergarten age there was this one grocery store that had an aisle where the lights weren't working. It was the peanut butter and jelly aisle and all the jars were just glowing because the aisle next to them allowed light to come through the side. I would just run up and down the aisle because I thought it was so interesting.

I'd also set up haunted houses in my cousin's bedroom because he had all of these cool light up Star Wars toys and I'd lead people in one by one to look at all of the different displays. And I also did a lot of drawing of 2-D things so when I went to college I ended up studying painting, but I also studied jewelry as well.

MK: Where did you go to school?

LF: I went to Drake University in Des Moines Iowa. I was a painting major and one of the things I found was ... we did a lot of still lifes. Through learning those fundamentals I realized I was really interested in the spaces between the objects, rather than painting the objects themselves. The more time I spent there the more sensitive I became to the placement of objects and the way they worked together. That and the moods the different configurations create.

Also, I spent a lot of time in the jewelry studio making objects, some with strange telescoping parts and dark patinas. Eventually, both interests kind of came together with the installations where I place objects in the spaces I create or tune... in the case of larger scale situations. I often make dark mysterious spaces with elements that are lit to enhance the viewer's fascination or the mysterious qualities of the experience.

MK: So that does connect and function with your early experiences

LF: Although I didn't realize that I could use installation when I was younger. I didn't realize that sort of thing could be art, because I was brought up to believe that art was drawing or painting. Installation art wasn't something I encountered until college and I started looking at people like Eva Hesse. But I didn't really start doing installation art until I moved to Portland and took a few continuing ed courses at PNCA. That's when I got my first solo show at the Manuel Izquierdo Gallery from Nan Curtis.

MK: What artists influenced you? who do you like?

LF: Donald Judd, Robert Irwin, Eva Hesse, Hieronymus Bosch and de Chirico are influences and I like Smithson's mirrors, some of Louise Bourgeois's works, Willem Kalf and Larry Bell.

MK: This notion of mood and the space between objects that you've spoken about relates to the installation you have up now at the New American Art Union... there is a very particular mood in that gallery and when one is in it you are just as aware of the space as you are of the objects in it. The objects highlight the space to the point where everything becomes the piece and not just markings on the wall that are created by the light reflected from the box in the center of the room. In essence, all corners of the room are opened for investigation. It's a dark, foreboding and uncomfortable mood. Is that how you see it? And can you describe the piece and its title?

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LF: Well the title of the piece is Evident, which basically gives out as little information as possible while cuing the viewer that they are going to have to take an investigative attitude. It has a sense of humor too, because what is Evident in the room is so not obvious.

MK: Do you want to talk directly about the piece?

LF: It is about perception, anticipation and expectations. The room is dark and as the viewer moves into it you are trying to get your bearings so you start at the first element which is a table. The table has its top split in two and inside the gap there are mirrors and several objects that one can only partially make out because the top is only partially open.

Then you move onto the middle of the room which is where the object with a projector in it is. That box projects insects on all of the walls intermittently so that the viewer might only catch glimpses of activity. Meanwhile while you are looking at the lights, there is a large empty cabinet at the end of the room that has a foreboding presence. It's dark so you are only aware of it when you are nearby and its posture and placement in the room suggests a dark figure in the background. As you come up to it the door is partially open so you can peek inside. When you look you might expect that there is something in it, but inside it is just black. There is nothing to see there, just space.

That space has a feeling about it as if that space were an object or a presence. Actually, I deliberately made the cabinet about as tall as a person so that it would feel like an authoritative, watchful presence.

MK: And the light on the wall?

LF: The reflected lights on the wall have very intermittent activity and a lot of times you won't see any insects at all but you will catch something out of the corner of your eye or the insects dart through very quickly or eventually you will see an insect just sitting for a while. And there is a real surreal quality to it because it is winter now and the bugs are out of season, normally they would all be dead.

MK: You mentioned at the outset that your work is about perception and anticipation of the viewer but really you kind of deny the viewer the grand reward. So there is this anticipation that something is going to happen and a little glimpse from the light box or the reflection up on the walls you see one bug but there is this sense that there is something more to come. You set up this situation for the viewer where they anticipate something to come but then you deny it because there is no big reward and the gestures are very minimal and subtle. Is that a strategy you use in your other work? I'm sure it's purposeful.

LF: Well it is purposeful and you can look at it a few different ways. You could see the cabinet as empty and it isn't giving up any of its secrets or you could see it as an opportunity to wonder and question, is there really nothing in there or is there something in there intermittently just like the video of the bugs? It calls into question our beliefs and powers of observation. Or is the presence of the space actually the reward?

MK: In this body of work and your other work there is this hint of science, like a faux laboratory. Where did this interest come from?

LF: Actually I'm very interested in how people figure out or explain what is going on around them. Basically figuring out the unknown and the scientific method is just that, using experiments in very deliberate and controlled ways to try and answer questions about what something is or why certain things occur so they can make predictions about what is going to happen in the future. So I like to play with that methodology and strategically disrupt it.

MK: So are you mimicking the aesthetics of the laboratory, does that come into play in your work?

LF: Well it does in a way, I like to be just suggestive of it so the viewer can feel like it is kind of a laboratory but it still doesn't have 100% of all the elements of a lab. Instead of the illusion of a lab, I design the furniture so they aren't completely identifiable and the proportions are somewhat uncomfortable or suggest a different agenda. A real lab is a

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working environment and there is a stillness to what I do that implies something else.

MK: Kind of like the Frankenstein laboratory a little bit because you don't know what is developing and it has this fantastical element.

LF: Right, it looks like a laboratory that is not to code, so you never know what is going to happen.

MK: There is this whole value to that type of conversation because it is the unknown. Because of the setting you don't know if something is trapped in the box or under the glass and that often comes up in your work. There is something about it that is very visually captivating but is also simultaneously unnerving or disturbing.

You mentioned to me previously that with a previous piece, Interspace (Quality Pictures, 2008), somebody tried to release the cat that was projected walking around above the viewer in a false ceiling you constructed. Is that something you encourage or a response that you are interested in from your viewers?

LF: Well I'm interested in strong viewer responses but I don't necessarily want them taking apart my sculptures and installations physically. But it is really interesting that what I do is kind of like an experiment on the viewers. I mean, there are a variety of responses. Some people have been more apathetic, just merely observing and some people are more empathetic and concerned whether the cat is being fed, they are convinced it is alive. That is when a few people have tried to go in or they were just trying to figure out how it was put together. I keep my designs very simple and elegant but they require a great deal of precision so if someone tampers with one I have to recalibrate it.

Then there are people who try to test the animal's response by tapping on the plexiglass and waiting for a reaction. If they see a motion at that time they often interpret it as a response to their action, and therefore the animal is alive and real. Scientists call that apophenia, a false positive.

There was another piece called Transposition. It's a box that was on the floor and within it a cat is projected as if it is moving around inside the box.

MK: You showed that at Audio Cinema for the Portland Experimental Film Festival's video show (2007)?

LF: Right, That's one place I have showed it. It has milky white plastic on one end and a series of ventilation holes on the sides. The way the cat image moves across the plastic and throws spatially corroborating shadows through the ventilation holes in another direction really looks like there is a real cat inside. The cat is sniffing around, tapping things with its paws and testing the borders of the box. Essentially the piece uses the normally flattening process of making a video to make a three dimensional Transposition of the cat and the space it is exploring.

It's really believable and I've watched people watch it and sometime people will test it to see if there is really something in the box.

MK: Back to the earlier notion of a science lab and Shelly's Frankenstein, do you read a lot of science fiction literature?

LF: Well actually I don't get very much time to do a lot of in depth reading but I did start reading many chapters of Frankenstein and scanned Lovecraft's Reanimator when I was looking for titles last summer. Despite that, I ended up coming up with Evident on my own.

MK: I have a quote by Elizabeth Pence about your objects in your Seattle show.... In it she wrote about, "linkages to a validating sphere of knowledge, they exist as hollow signifiers of scientific industry and may exist in an aestheticized realm as a false archive." Do you connect to that? Because she seems to be going back to this notion that you are creating this scientific archive... a cabinet of curiosities of sorts like the museum of Jurassic technology?

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LF: I'm really not setting out to make something that looks like an archive of science, which might imply science from a certain era but of course it's a valid observation about the work. It is put out there to spark people's various interpretations from their own experiences rather than something specific from mine. I might tease and suggest an archive in the most basic sketch of the work, so you could see it that way or maybe as a fungus you just found in your fridge.

It can even be more personal like something you discovered in the landscape or more scientific/historical things. People project their interpretations and it's why some people really connect with the work. The work is very porous to interpretation because it has been divested of everything but the necessary details, which leaves room for the viewer.

MK: This plays with the notion that you are pushing the psychological effect on the viewer. That you are toying with our ability to believe or our desire to believe.

LF: Well one of the things that I have noticed about religion is that people use it to explain and comfort themselves about the unknown and that kind of intersects with science as well. I'm interested in the areas where people are more uncomfortable with the unknown, the choices or mechanisms they use to interpret open ended situations

MK: Hm, it doesn't feel that open ended to me.

LF: Really?

MK: It feels like you are asking the viewer to choose what they desire. To choose their notion of what they desire to be real. But I guess it is open ended in that the viewer has to make the choice.

LF: That's what I mean by open ended as far as interpretation goes, but I do create a scenario that compresses and intensifies the viewer's experience.

MK: You spoke before about psychology in your work, do you want to talk more about that?

LF: I'm playing with the type of reaction that people will have. One important element is empathy. Several of my videos have looked like an animal, insect or cat, is in some kind of confined situation where the placement and the size of the enclosure effects the level and the kind of empathy a person will have. In some cases the animal is in too small a space to be comfortable long term, or that they might imply they are being held against their will or like in an installation like Interspace they are definitely comfortable. The body language of an animal, the work's position and the size of the enclosure are really important.

MK: That is a huge part of what you do, like in the Interspace installation with the large false ceiling... that cat shouldn't have been up there. By the way, who is the star of the videos with cats?

LF: Transposition and Interspace were Sid, the black cat who was just sitting here. He really loves boxes and the sets I use so it's a big game for him, he always wants to get involved.

MK: Insects are much different from cats though because they generally aren't pets and that makes us more uncomfortable. We are less empathetic and have more fear than with insects than with domesticated animals.

LF: Well I think with Evident the insects are surrounding the person on all four sides so it's almost like you are in the place of the cat from Interspace. In Interspace the cat is engulfed in space and the viewer is watching it explore. In Evident you are moving around looking at the space and you are surrounded by the video, which generates an enhanced sense of space.

MK: So we are the cat?

LF: Sort of, but it's not the same

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MK: Because we are not being watched, unless you have hidden cameras?

LF: No cameras, but I do watch the viewers and even without me actively doing that the cabinet is analogous to another human presence in the room.

MK: It has been mentioned by other writers that there is a connection to minimalism in your work. What is your connection to that work? Do you connect yourself to minimalism?

LF: Well I really love minimalism but I don't call myself a minimalist. Apparently a lot of other people have connected me with minimalism, but I just prefer to use an economy of means. I don't want to use any more elements than are absolutely necessary. Extra elements are just fluff and they weigh down the essence of the work and make it less successful.

When I was going to college I would often go to the Des Moines Art Center. There was this one Donald Judd piece that I loved, Untitled 1976-1977. It is comprised of rows of stainless steel boxes, many of which had diagonal interior surfaces tilted at different angles. Also the way they had it displayed was right under a skylight so it reflected the sun. I really appreciated the mirroring and the way it handled the light. I also spent a lot of time looking at the Robert Irwin disk, which had four lights on it. Those two works were basically using light as an object.

MK: So you wouldn't describe yourself as a minimalist, how would you describe yourself?

LF: I would consider myself as more of a director because I organize elements for a certain effect upon the viewer. Like at the New American Art Union I'm using light effects, the spaces between objects and the subject matter of the insects all to create a mood.

MK: What about your relationship to the fantastic? I mean there is the legerdemain or slight of hand that tricks the viewer. Or you have something like your Reed show, a curio cabinet full of wonders that one can't quite get to. Your installations seem like something we know, they are canny in that way but not completely.

LF: Well I do like to play tricks on the eye, like the table with the opening and a mirror inside in the current show. I'm playing with the depth in the table. If you are looking from the top downwards it is bottomless almost, but then you are seeing the ceiling in it as well as your own face and also the specimens. People have written about how the table has two specimens, but it has four. If you are very thorough and tilt your head down you will see three but the fourth one is nearly impossible to see... you can do it only from the corner of your eye. It is almost like a test of one's powers of observation and another layer of mystery. As for the fantastic, I'm definitely interested in what is strange and of the other but it's never as literal as specific monsters or science fiction.

MK: So it is not fantastical, it is mystery

LF: Possibly but because nothing in the show is something you can quite identify decisively...

MK: It's mysterious

LF: But I do have an interest in the fantastic, but whether I put that straight forwardly into my work in any identifiable way is another question.

MK: There is this otherworldly aspect though, because at the New American Art Union you have transformed the gallery and you don't feel like you are going into a traditional exhibition space at all. With the projection and the objects there is this otherworldly aesthetic and a sense of logic behind it.

LF: The fact that I have insects in there alone changes things. Those are summertime insects in the middle of winter, which have an otherworldly out of season effect and something I was very conscious of cultivating. The installation

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objects transform the space and the space in turn transforms the objects so they kind of mirror each other's influence and it has an open ended yet complete feel.

MK: So what's your process?

LF: Typically I have something in mind about a certain type of experience I want to create or I have a specific idea about a video or object I want to create and I basically experiment in the studio. Like with Evident I made a prototype of the box, actually several different versions of it to determine how it would work in the space so the process of making the work is like I'm in a lab.

MK: That definitely fits in with your methodology

LF: And also with the objects that I make, I call them specimens... I basically experiment with several different types of methods, materials and castings and I do pretty much have a scientific method for testing it out where I'll do a specific casting several different ways with very slight differences... because I want to understand how they operate and what effects are maximized or minimized with each differentiating variable. For example I'll cast an object with a clear resin and then I'll add or take away elements like color or particles that make them more opaque or luminescent. Eventually, I set out whole arrays of them out on a work table so I can figure out how they interact with each other.

MK: What do you do with your spare time? (laughs)

LF: Spare time? Well I do go for a lot of walks, I like to cook and I'm very into gardening. I like to go to nurseries and try to find the strangest plants and see how they grow.

MK: Cooking is a lot like the lab.

LF: Actually I've done some experiments with cooking too.

MK: How so?

LF: Ive made different spice blends or different recipes using an empirical process. Like just for gingerbread I've used two different kinds of molasses and different kinds of sugar and tried to make the darkest dark gingerbread or the lightest and everything in between. It is a testing process.

MK: Is there a goal to find the perfect gingerbread?

LF: Not really, just to find out what different kinds I can come up with... finding the extremes.

MK: So your pastimes are other kinds of experiments whether it be the kitchen or the garden.

Where do your titles come from?

LF: Actually, it's the last thing I do, and I only title them because I think leaving it untitled would be more distracting. I try to make them succinct as well as both vague and specific at the same time. Typically that means they sound vaguely scientific because I don't want to draw too much attention to the titles. I'm more interested in the work itself. To me it's the way the viewers experience the work, instead of having to read about it.

MK: You don't want a didactic experience

LF: I just want people to experience their own perception

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Laura Fritz at NAAU
By Brian Libby
The Oregonian
2 February, 2009

The stream of white light from a video or film projector can conjure countless images, from automobile headlights and stage spotlights to a flashlight searching the dark. In Laura Fritz's exhibition at New American Art Union, "Evident," little more than a projection of blank beams onto walls manages to evoke a mysterious, sinister world.

Fritz's show is the latest in the gallery's "Couture" series, in which dealer Ruth Ann Brown has provided ten artists with stipends and accompanying exhibitions--no strings attached. That's particularly enabling for an installation like Fritz's. There is no object for a collector to buy here. Instead, one gets a quietly mesmerizing experience.

Entering the exhibit brings a wave of darkness like stepping into a haunted house, not in the sense of being frightened but in succumbing to an entire environment of shadows. Fritz actually constructed an entire new drywall to block out the light from the gallery's floor-to-ceiling entrance. By comparison, the experimental film collective Cinema Project, which used to hold screenings at NAAU, simply used a temporary curtain. This meticulous, almost obsessive detail underscores and heightens the effect of Fritz's minimalist stagecraft.

A video projector in the gallery's center, projecting an almost clear beam (with footage showing only insects intermittently crawling across the lighted frame), is covered by a box that has honeycomb-like circular patterns cut into its sides. A mirror inside the box angled in front of the lens multiplies the effect, sending beams onto all four walls. Yet as with the work of "Light and Space" movement pioneer Hap Tivey (particularly his masterful installation during the 2007 Time-Based Art Festival, "Building White/Eclipse"), the light itself is the star attraction. A cynic might dismiss this as merely a highbrow lava-lamp or laser light-show effect, but that would be too dismissive of the ethereal mood Fritz creates, or the sculptural quality of the projector enclosure.

Like Jacqueline Ehlis in her "Couture" show last summer, Fritz treats the NAAU space not just as a vessel for the art, but part of the exhibit. Innocuous but eye-catching details of the interior environment (designed by award-winning local architect Richard Potestio) hence become heightened and blurred with the art: a soft drone from building's heating system, for example, or the faintly illuminated timber ceiling above. Fritz also projects the light precisely to straddle certain corners within the room, highlighting its geometry.

Accompanying the light-projecting box are two furniture-like pieces: a wardrobe with the door ever so slightly ajar, and a table split in the middle to reveal a mirrored drawer underneath. The drawer also has two gelatinous, organically shaped forms inside (think slugs made of gelatin), but to get a good look at them one has to peer closely enough to put one's own reflection at close range. In each case, a Donald Judd-esque simple form straddling abstract sculpture and functional item seems to suggest more ominous goings on. Although these works are side attractions to the perforated light-emitting box at the center of "Evident," they all offer a tiny hint of something larger that lies beyond.

What is it inside the wardrobe or in the light beams? That's where Fritz leaves it to the viewer, and depending on your taste this is either the delight or the frustration of minimalist art: that whether through objects or the shadowy setting, it is a means for--and depends upon--triggering our imagination.

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“Exit Wounds -- Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming”

By Julie Sullivan

Oregonian

Thursday October 16, 2008

The real shock of Jim Lommasson’s new exhibit “Exit Wounds” is not just his lonesome portraits of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, but the 1,500 photos by veterans that accompany them.

The images, captured by digital cameras and carried home on laptops, unroll the current wars in all their complex cinematic breadth: Santa seated in a desert flak jacket. A burned, dismembered leg. Children peering into the lens, as if to say, “Who are you?”

“Who are you?”

“This project really is about the veterans telling the public their stories,” Lommasson says of his new show at the New American Art Union.

Like many Oregonians, most of what the critically acclaimed photographer knew about the wars two years ago was the daily casualty report, personal tragedies presented as impersonally as a box score. But on long walks through North Portland with his 85-year-old dad, Lommasson started thinking deeply of the men and women fighting.

His father was wounded and won the Bronze Star in the Battle of the Bulge. But only on those walks did the senior Lommasson begin to talk fully about his war, sharing experiences with his son he’d never told anyone. Lommasson, a photographer and oral historian, wrote that it became clear his dad had “done his best to spare me and everyone else the reality of war.” Leah Nash/Special to The Oregonian “It’s really about the veterans telling the public their story.” Soon Lommasson was going to veterans’ gatherings, standing at the VFW or American Legion and state task force meetings to find men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Sixty years,” he says, “is way too long to keep a secret.”

Lommasson said he didn’t want to construct a political statement for or against the current wars. He wanted to listen to veterans from the Pacific Northwest who served. And so, veterans began to sit down with him. Some are loving parents; bright, ambitious students; or impassioned veteran advocates, despite their own wounds.

“I’m helping a soldier out now, which helps me heal, too,” says one man. “I got 30 seconds of my dream; I’d give my other leg to live it again.”

Others are drifting and damaged.

“I self-medicated, I drank, I got arrested five times ... DUIs.”

Lommasson originally had intended to make portraits of only the veterans, but subjects kept passing along their own captivating photos. He was so affected, he decided to include the images. He didn’t want them to be incidental, so he displays his portraits cut into the same 4-by-6 snapshot as the photos. What results is a procession of faces and places that raise more questions, like:

“If you knew you could die driving down this road today, what would you photograph?”

“Who should be a soldier?”

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“Who can come back from that experience?”

Lommasson concludes that “the cost of war isn’t just sending people now. It’s the rest of their lives.”

A catalog of words and photos accompanies the show, with proceeds to benefit veterans and Iraqi children. Lommasson considers this his first report to the community on a book-length project.

He also invites soldiers and vets to add photos and words to the walls. He sees the exhibit as something that could travel or be staged in other spaces in other cities, an exhibit that is illuminating -- and therapeutic.

“We don’t want handouts or special treatment. All we want is for people to understand us, to give us the respect we deserve. It was really hard for me to write this, to remember all this stuff. Thank you to all who I served with. There will be none that can take your place.”

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“Orbis Viridis Obscurus: Ethan Jackson at NAAU”

By Amy Bernstein

PORT

www.portlandart.net

25 August, 2008

Ethan Jackson's transformation of the New American Art Union this month is beautiful and baffling. Walking into the first section of the exhibit, Jackson has transformed the front windows of the gallery space into a giant camera obscura entitled 'Polyopticon VII' which depicts the side of the street opposite the gallery. Despite the advanced nature of the technology of optics in this day and time, this ancient discovery of the nature of lenses never fails to awe an audience. As humans, we love seeing the world projected and duplicated, especially larger than life and in real time. Sitting in the first section of the exhibition has a calming effect on the viewer; it is a silent upside down movie without a plot, the mirror image of what exists inside the brain if we turned around and watched the scene behind us. In this way, this section is a strange bouncing off of identical images we perceive and which our brains automatically interpret. The camera obscura is also the secret of Old Master painting techniques, and in this way the exhibition's luminosity and beauty bask in a sort of nostalgic, painterly glow. This is the introduction to Jackson's ideas and to the inflections of his style. We leave the first section of the exhibition, guided by a diagram provided by the gallery. In the center of NAAU's space, four television monitors ('Orbis Obscurus') are arranged in a circle. Their screens face the ceiling, and atop each sits a mirrored cylinder. Each monitor depicts swirling whorls of changing colors and as the viewer looks into each cylinder, a traveling view of a three dimensional landscape appears, as if one is flying over the surface of the earth, so to speak.

These pieces are visually neat; they display a sort of virtual, inside out kaleidoscope, and it is with these pieces that Jackson most directly points to what he claims to be talking about with this exhibit: a dark and unrecognized mental space that hovers between the meeting point of perception and vision. This is the abstract space Jackson believes to house a sort of transcendental imagination. The entirely abstract nature of this concept is not difficult to comprehend, yet it is not entirely conveyed when looking at the work. The strongest point of the exhibit is the sheer beauty of Jackson's reification. These pieces are mesmerizing. They are lyrical and poetic.

Jackson's statement accompanying the diagram delves haphazardly into the inspiration of literature concerning the choices of which landscape fragments he employs for 'Orbis Obscurus'. Yet this information is arbitrary and only serves to weaken the experience of his work. It is apparent that the formal elements of the pieces, when analyzed, would perhaps point to these concepts, yet to mentally travel to this sort of space seems forced. When arriving at these concepts, one naturally jumps to the question of why and is abruptly stopped. Does Jackson propose that this is where the imagination dwells? Where the darkness of the human spirit lurks? Is this place what he deems the 'Orbis Viridis Obscurus'? I am not sure. It seems that by laying these concepts across the tops of these ethereal works might actually be somewhat damaging to them. To allow this work to exist in its own right allows it to breathe and move in the viewer's eye and mind, allows it to move beyond perhaps what the artist ever intended. In many ways, this exhibition feels as if it calls to the musings of the renaissance spirit in a contemporary context. As many technically advanced optics as this exhibition employs, it waxes nostalgic for the days of old film. The projections of the camera obscura feel like the projections of old film reels. Artists like Joseph Cornell James Turrell, come to mind, artists all interested in the essence of the passage of time and how the landscape (whether natural or constructed) acts as stage and symbol. Jackson's work also uses the lens as poetic purveyor, turning the landscape upside down and inside out to make us pay attention to our surroundings and the actuality of our perception.

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A 'Serenade' to Light, Space

Brian Libby

The Oregonian

A&E25 July, 2008

Jacqueline Ehlis' exhibit at the New American Art Union gives added meaning to the notion of art installation. Rather than merely drawing our attention to the artwork, Ehlis uses her pieces to spotlight the architecture of the gallery and how light moves through the space.

Called "Serenade," the show includes five minimalist works, each comprising numerous identical paintings in varying shades of white. Each painting is paired with different materials: mirrors, sculpted metal, projection. Many of the pieces also protrude from or recede into the wall.

Viewing "Serenade" is a kind of designed experience as much as a collection of paintings. As such, it highlights architect Rick Potestio's modest but exceptional plan for this former industrial space, with its blend of natural wood ceilings, white walls and more natural light than usually exists in galleries.

"Serenade" is the latest in the "Couture" series, for which Art Union owner Ruth Ann Brown has awarded \$8,000 stipends to 10 artists for mounting special exhibitions at the gallery. This is the third Couture show, with Ehlis following exhibits by The Video Gentlemen (Carl Diehl, Jesse England and Mack McFarland) and TJ Norris earlier this spring. Freed from the pressure of making sales, the artists can pursue ideas and projects that might not otherwise be possible. It allowed Ehlis, who was represented previously by the now-defunct Savage Gallery, to make a series of paintings that can be fully appreciated only in this gallery, during this five-week show.

For example, the artist's "Cinema of the Blushing Skin" includes a triptych of paintings with vertically striped patterns of subtly different gesso (a mixture of plaster or chalk and glue) finishes, recalling the work of Agnes Martin. The sides of each painting's frame are painted in a day-glow color (orange, purple) that reflects light powerfully beside the huge storefront floor-to-ceiling glass of the gallery's entry. One of the paintings is also mounted above the perimeter of the drywall so that it's level with the base of a ceiling beam. Onto the trio of paintings, Ehlis projects faintly from a ceiling-mounted projector a series of still photographs.

Another piece, "After Hours Red (The Red Corner)" references the slatted wood mezzanine overlooking the two-story main gallery space. But Ehlis also takes as inspiration the "red corner" common in orthodox Russian faith, in which practitioners living far from a church would reserve a special corner of their homes (where the morning sun's rays first landed) as a family altar.

This influence seems fitting, because despite the minimalist style of the paintings, there is an unmistakably spiritual, serene feeling one gets from this exhibit. It's a show of paintings, and excellent ones at that, but it feels more like an exploration of light and its properties, with the works acting figuratively, and in one case literally, as mirrors.

"By taking on the idea of what makes a painting work in space," Ehlis writes in her artist statement, "I've focused in on ... celebrating one's method of seeing, thereby changing the world." That's a lot to ask from a room full of white paintings, but it's true that seeing "Serenade," particularly in the late afternoon on a sunny day when the light is at its most dramatic, can be truly transporting.

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Jacqueline Ehlis at New American Art Union
Richard Speer
Art Ltd
September/October, 2008

That Jacqueline Ehlis is a Dave Hickey protégée is not a Rosetta Stone to her work, but it's a good start. Sure, Ehlis' work exudes the brand of exuberant abstraction that her former professor at UNLV tenaciously champions (Hickey recently curated Ehlis into his "Las Vegas Diaspora" traveling exhibition), but in "Serenade," her first solo show at New American Art Union, Ehlis proved that her shiny, glinting creations are more than just eye candy. With its winning wit and fastidious execution, the show was an exercise in tarted-up deconstruction, equally unafraid of beauty or provocation.

Many of the works in the show riffed on the idea of blurring distinctions between media. In the triptych, *Flush*, *Poise*, and *Immerse*, scrolls of primary-colored construction paper unfurled into polished aluminum wave shapes, which projected sculpturally into the room. Beneath these forms hung canvases that were blank except for a single strip of color on each edge; in turn, the canvases were mounted on sheets of steel visible only from the side. The use of construction paper imparted an evolutionary feel, as if a kindergarten drawing class had quantum-leapt into a master metalworker's studio. In *Cinema of the Blushing Skin*, the artist projected semi-abstract photographs onto three canvases, each subdivided into three vertical planes of differing finishes. The left side of each canvas was painted DayGlo colors—fluorescent yellow, fuchsia, and blue—which cast ghostly chromatic echoes onto the walls behind them, transgressing the canvases' borders and, in a favorite Ehlis motif, subtly invading the viewer's personal space.

Essentially minimalist and deconstructive, *Serenade* avoided over-earnestness via the works' Pop colors and juxtaposition of lowbrow materials and "finish fetish" finesse. This confluence came through most clearly in *Delightful Exaltations*, in which sheets of sparkly vinyl paper—the sort used in baseball cards and novelty stickers—were drolly presented in wooden frames, vertically sandwiched between blank canvases below and mirrors above. Caggy stuff indeed: the blank canvases offered no content; the framed pieces gave only the ephemera of the cheap thrill; and, at the top, the mirror implicated and invited the viewer to reflect, literally, on whether "content" is necessary in an era of froth and flash.

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Jacqueline Ehlis reflects on NAAU

by John Motley

Portland Mercury

July 31, 2008

Imagine nearly every gallery you've ever been in and, chances are, what sticks out is the lone glaring similarity: uninterrupted white walls. What doesn't always register, in considering the simulacra of the white-walled box, are the more subtle characteristics—from architecture to lighting—that really define an exhibition space and determines how work will look in it. But in *Serenade*, her first solo show in Portland since 2005, Jacqueline Ehlis turns that relationship on its head, exploiting the New American Art Union's architectural idiosyncrasies as a critical component of her work.

In "Tell of One Thing More Than This," the artist presents five narrow canvases, hung equidistant and painted white to match the gallery's walls. Head on, its contours are traced by shadow, but, as one moves away, its edges appear to simply disappear into the walls. The adjacent "After Hours Red (The Red Corner)" plays off the vertical-slatted balcony that it's hung beneath. In the six steel panels that creep up the corner, a more minimal version of the pattern is recreated, all under the barely perceptible glow of a red light. For Ehlis, it is a conflation of carnal desire and religious passion, referencing red light districts and the *krasny ugol*, or "red" corner, where red candles and religious icons are commonly displayed in Russian homes. But, for someone who had never visited the gallery before, "After Hours Red" could blend into the space's architecture, unseen.

In "Cinema of the Blushing Skin," which is hung directly next to the gallery's front windows, natural light adds another variable to an already subtle, if dense, installation. Here, a video of 88 photographs that Ehlis snapped at the Venice Biennale is projected on three muted paintings, in which a base of intensely vibrant color has been coated over in gesso. In daylight, the details of the projected images—mostly travel photography and pictures of other artists' work—are washed out and reduced to a ghostly shimmering on the surface of the canvases. Because the projection is barely perceptible, it has the odd effect of drawing viewers in to more closely examine the paintings. Instead of fulfilling their ostensible role as screens (i.e., passive receptors), they begin to actively communicate through subtle texture and the muffled energy of the buried hues: hot pink and highlighter yellow.

Ehlis' work has obvious roots in Minimalism and Op Art, but she applies their forms and concepts in an altogether different way. Namely, she creates a kind of recursive dialogue, in which the tension between exhibited art and exhibition space ensures that the viewer's attention constantly flip-flops between the two.

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TJ Norris at New American Art Union
Richard Speer
art ltd.
July/August 2008

TJ Norris timewarps into the future and the past in his installation, INFINITUS, billed as a “multimedia video lounge.” The elegant exhibition is something of a love letter to New York City in the Ed Koch era, when the then-twentysomething artist haunted Brooklyn and Manhattan, attending Warhol and Basquiat openings and soaking up an ambiance that pivoted between chi-chi and seedy. Inside New American Art Union’s main gallery space (windows covered in linen block out external light), a light box announces in calligraphic script, “Reserve the right to remain silent,” aping Miranda rights and establishing a cheekily sinister atmosphere. Five gray slabs lead the eye through the space, each appointed with a head cushion which grudgingly invites the viewer to recline and watch two channels of video projected onto the ceiling above. The imagery includes vintage-1980s automobiles whooshing by; a hand-held camera lumbering down a run-down apartment hallway; a disco ball lazily revolving in the middle of a wood-paneled room; and a traffic sign silhouetted against the gray sky. These images unfurl as a specially commissioned soundtrack, Christian Renou’s Land of Confusion, sputters and pulsates ambiently.

At the gallery’s far wall is a cutout skyline of Manhattan stretching across the room, backlit, with traces of illumination spilling over from a whorish red light seeping out of the bathroom from a complementary installation by Rose McCormick, entitled Dovetail Deux. In this futuristic sepulcher of monochrome gray, the judicious emanation of color adds a welcome za-za-zoom. Indeed, the show as a whole benefits from a dialectic between integration and dissonance: the cucumber-cool minimalism of the space versus the gritty, grainy portrait of New York displayed in the video footage. This is New York not as it was in reality, nor even in Norris’ halcyon flashbacks; it is more a kind of theme park ride in the future that summons forth a simulacrum that is impersonal yet still evocative of a time and place lapsed but not entirely lost.

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TJ Norris: Infinitus
John Motley
Portland Mercury
June 05, 2008

Cities are often metaphorized as living things: Their streets and thoroughfares are veins and arteries, their pulsing centers, hearts. Of course, their citizens are responsible for their animation, but somehow the most impressive metropolises suggest that as environments, they have nearly outpaced such human dimensions. Instead, they seem to take on a life of their own, growing and mutating like some viral strain. This latter vision of the city dominates *INFINITUS*, TJ Norris' new immersive video installation of "a seamless, endless city" at New American Art Union, and the final installment in his Tribryd series, which began in 2003. Here, Norris continues to mine the readymade imagery of the city, from the clean lines of urban architecture to the erratic, bubbling forms of graffiti. And as ever, he does not labor to decode or even interpret what he finds, but is simply seduced by their surfaces.

Entering the exhibit, one passes through a heavy black curtain into a dark room, where a black-and-white, two-channel video is projected on the ceiling. The room itself is filled with five divan-sized viewing beds, where visitors can recline as Norris' video unfolds above them. The video itself oscillates between representation (lampposts, a helix spiral of razor wire) and abstraction (fuzzy-edged lights blink like champagne bubbles), and is accompanied by French composer Christian Renou's score, which marries Angelo Badalamenti's maudlin synth-scapes to experimental electronics. At first, the experience—the shuffling imagery, the jarringly unpredictable soundtrack—mimics the sensory overload of street life, but, the longer one stays in the gallery, the cacophony of sight and sound gradually recedes. It soon becomes a relaxing, tranquil experience, in which the stimuli wane to an even and forgettable background noise—not unlike the ubiquitous honking horns and shouts of city streets.

As Norris situates his viewers flat on their backs, he subconsciously prods them to compare the experience of city life to similarly positioned activities. Most obviously, it conjures movie-going or the less literal cinema of dreaming. For Norris, urban living is akin to the stylized magic—and disorienting fragmentation—of images scrolling across a screen, a version of interpretation and narrative construction that is, by now, second nature. So even in Norris' un-navigable city, we still feel at home.

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Elegy to Analog: BYOTV at The New American Art Union
By Amy Bernstein
PORT
22 March, 2008

Dear (Video) Ladies and Gentlemen,

The death of an era is upon us. On February 17, 2009 the FCC will terminate the broadcast transmissions of analog signals in favor of an entirely digital broadcast system. To receive these new signals, one must own either a digitally receptive television or purchase an analog converter, for which the government has issued coupons and for which may be applied through various FCC websites. Such a change will mark something quite significant, as the government's clammy dip into something so personal as our television scented daily lives feels perhaps a little too close for comfort. For the first time ever we will be governmentally mandated to update our televisions. What this will mean for the American public is up for discussion, not only logistically but culturally. Despite the fact that the topic happens to be mere electronic pathways, invisible conduits for the transmission of our Jerry Springer and Seinfeld, our cartoons or the nightly news, this technological wonder revolutionized the world in such a way that the strength and plethora of its subcultures proliferated. Televised analog signals became somewhat medium unto themselves, the very material of moving images becoming metaphysical, existential, a stuff to wield and analyze.

The first group of juried shows the NAAU has lined up for the coming year spotlights the true lovers (and soon to be mourners) of the analog signal in the tribute, BYOTV, the Video Gentleman's elegiac concert to this era. Alas, analog lovers unite, for this is a celebration. The artists encourage visitors to the gallery to bring their own t.v.'s, as the title of the show suggests, so that they may pick up their own signals with various, idiosyncratic results. For the entire duration of this exhibition, the Video Gentlemen have scheduled a variety of programming that explore the contribution of the transmission of images and sound via cathode ray tube, magnet, and electricity and the various quirks and magic upon which its recipients corroborated.

Carl Diehl's "Blobsquatch: Patrolling the Ether" documents the work and interests of those fascinated by EVP or Electronic Voice Phenomena. These groups dedicate much of their lives to the detection of voices or images within what has become a rather electric atmosphere.

With so many different types of signal being transmitted through our atmosphere, EVP subscribers believe there to be much undetected communication occurring in the in between of received signals. This communication is believed to be conducted by supernatural beings or ghosts. There are many who in fact believe that the deceased have the power to communicate through these superfluous waves and wish to intercept messages from beyond the grave. The "Spy Numbers Stations" suddenly detected during the Cold War were a similar sort of secret communication discovered and investigated yet were later believed to be communication between spies rather than spirits. In light of this coming February, Diehl's documentary suggests perhaps an end to these analog mystics' ease of access to their own religion and folklore, to what Diehl's documentary deems "sanctuaries for eclectic electronic ecosystems" or "active electronic ghostlands"

Truly, this show lauds the trappings of mad scientists, supernaturalists, and audio visual theorists, those that appreciate the intellectual property surrounding certain phenomena and aesthetics within great melting iceberg bits of culture. The exhibition is visually sophisticated, tightly highlighting the rather pointed notion of a relatively new beauty: the sleek, minimal, electrical beauty of Atari games, brand new appliances, and noise as music. This is the beauty of the flesh of the invisible, of transmitted electricity, the force that powers mouthwatering transmissions of our pop cultures, our entertainment, and many of our ideals. The Video Gentlemen have ingeniously translated this space into broadcast

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station, performance space, and hip electrical enclave. The catalogue for this show is art unto itself, each page graphically lovely and powerful enough to jog the memory of anyone who happened to own any sort of instructional manual for any piece of audio/visual analog receptor in the past thirty years.

Thus the eccentric hearts that sicken at the loss of analog broadcast lose more than their television sets; they lose their mechanics, the beauty of visual electrical error and function, the sort of humanity of electric signals. We have finally reached a technological age old enough to be nostalgic about our electricity. The switch from analog to an entirely digital broadcasting system is intended theoretically to make more money for all, to ease the burden of the federal deficit, to allow emergency response units easier communication with one another, and of course, to watch (even) more and better tv. Yet the public consequences of this enormous switch go relatively undiscussed on either local or global levels.

According to blogger Jahn, Some people do indeed like the hills and valleys in their English muffins or the blobby gaps in their analog broadcasts. Yet those who espouse the digital age cannot seem to understand this. The Video Gentlemen's programming this month is the reification of the worlds within worlds of those electronic hills and valleys about to be destroyed by mandated commerce. An analog anthology in real and recorded time, BYOTV is a preemptive tribute to the living medium of an era that parented most of our lives and imaginations. Will the digital age serve our analog brains as well? Only real time will tell.

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Supporting arts, right at its roots

by D.K. Row

The Oregonian

Oct 10, 2007

Portland's low-budget art scene got a healthy jolt Tuesday: an investment by a single dealer that directly challenges the city's major institutions and galleries to play the art game far more seriously.

Art dealer Ruth Ann Brown of the New American Art Union announced the 10 recipients of a special artists' stipend project. Each artist will receive \$8,000 --a \$7,000 stipend plus \$1,000 for art materials.

What makes the project even more unusual is that Brown is financing the entire project with her own money. In a city with an avalanche of artists but comparatively few patrons and supporters, that's a challenge to others to step up, too.

Called "Couture," the project will help the artists produce and then exhibit their most challenging work at Brown's gallery.

"Part of why I'm doing this is me being selfish," Brown says. "But also because I'm frustrated with what's going on here."

Brown says Portland's artists aren't being nurtured by its galleries and institutions, most of which aren't accurately reflecting the challenging nature of work in the city.

In the Age of the Billionaire, \$80,000 may not be an extraordinary amount of money. But Brown's gumption and generosity, the artistic freedom afforded to the selected artists, and the project's implications for the city's art scene transcend numbers. The project also is historic: Dealers have occasionally financed small projects by artists, but Brown's "Couture" idea is more systematic.

"In many ways, Ruth Ann is becoming more than a dealer," says Stephanie Snyder, director of the art gallery at Reed College, where Brown, 28, went to college before graduating from Portland State University. "She's a producer of projects. A facilitator of talent."

The 10 artists picked by Brown are Rose McCormick, Ty Ennis, Jim Lommasson, Jacqueline Ehlis, TJ Norris, Stephen Slappe, Vanessa Renwick, Laura Fritz, Ethan Jackson and three artists --Carl Diehl, Jesse England and Mack McFarland --who call themselves "The Video Gentlemen."

A few of the artists --McCormick, Ennis and Ehlis --are painters and drawers. Lommasson is a photographer. All are from the Portland area, although the 98 artists who applied for the stipend hail from around the nation, including Seattle, Los Angeles and New York.

Brown says she was attracted to these 10 artists because their work addressed two essential themes: how art and entertainment have merged into a new art form; and the political upheaval of the post-millennial era, a dialogue that Brown thinks today's artists have been reluctant to explore.

"Why is art moving away from the important contemporary issues of our times?" asks Brown, who opened her gallery three years ago.

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Four of the artists --McCormick, Ennis, Lommasson and Norris --are either represented by Brown or have shown at her gallery in the past. One other, Ehlis, participated in a group show and has also curated an exhibit at the gallery. The other five weren't affiliated with Brown's gallery, though she knew of their work.

All of the artists share a few qualities: None is an established figure regionally, although critics have praised the work of Ehlis and Renwick during the past decade. None is commercially oriented. And a few, like Jackson, have been working completely outside the local system.

Brown says the \$8,000 to each artist comes with "no strings." The only expectation of the artists is that they make work they might not otherwise get a chance to show in galleries.

That's one reason why the work won't be for sale. The artists will be free to produce art that pushes their respective artistic boundaries. Lommasson, for instance, finally will get to work on a long-brewing photo project documenting American soldiers returning from the Iraq war.

A native of Detroit, Brown says she's going to fund "Couture" by using some of the equity she's built up in the building that houses her gallery on Southeast Ankeny Street. She bought the building several years ago with money from a family inheritance. Brown's mother died when Brown was 9.

That may not be the most practical way to fund an ambitious art project. But in do-it-yourself Portland, it's an appropriately fitting way.

The few attempts to embrace the region's art activity comprehensively, such as the Portland Art Museum's Contemporary Northwest Art Awards --which will award one regional artist \$10,000 and a show at the museum next year --cater to already established or late-career artists or ignore the scene's bounty of talented but under-recognized artists.

The finalists for the CNAA are bland, Brown argues: "I understand (the importance of) honoring late-career artists, but I don't know if those choices benefit the community at large."

Whether you agree with Brown's assessment, the young dealer is banking that others will follow suit or challenge her.

"What everyone in the community has to do now is pay attention and see these shows," Snyder says. "And give them the respect that such a project deserves."

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