

Melody Owen

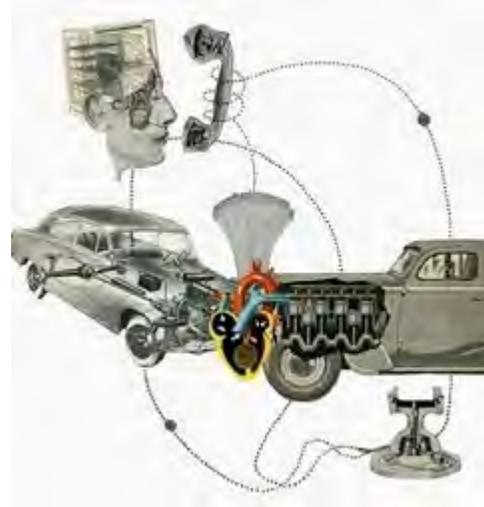
ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

417 N.W. 9th Avenue

November 5–January 2

Portland-based artist Melody Owen has worked in collage for over two decades, and this exhibition displays her command of the medium at its most inventive and sensitive. This is particularly true of the newest works here, which interweave botanical and zoological imagery—such as flowers, whales, skeletons, and brains—within macrocosmic networks such as circulatory systems, cellular structures, and cross-sections of trees or of the human body. Most of Owen's source materials are taken from old botany and anatomy books. The images have a velvety texture and a quiet range of tonality, evoking other wistful nature studies such as Leo Lionni's book *Parallel Botany* (1976).

In the small-scale, twenty-work series "Under My Skin" (all works cited, 2015), each piece contains two rounded or cropped black-and-white images of plant cells and tree rings. The circular images at the top of each piece are vertically bisected by old cutouts of colored trees, each of which Owen trimmed to focus on the thick, ridged mass of the trunks. This creates a disarming perspective that makes one feel as if one is gazing into a microscope and a telescope at the same time—a dichotomy that evinces the artist's preoccupation with both interior and exterior experience. In the collage *Cutaway: Carphone*, remnants of a human heart lurk at the center of a car crash as dotted lines snake through the cars, connecting a human head with a telephone receiver. The fine, hand-drawn lines ribbon across the page like telegraph wires, multiplying the works' associative meanings.



Melody Owen, *Cutaway: Carphone*, 2015, collage, 10 x 10".

— Stephanie Snyder

WILLAMETTE WEEK

Art Swatch: Galleries to Visit During the First Week of December Everything is Water at Elizabeth Leach and Urban Coyotes take of the Augen Gallery.



By Enid Spitz
December 2, 2015

An Opera for One

Tracing the multi-faceted career of Kartz Ucci, this retrospective exhibition delivers a fitting tribute to the late artist and her work. A professor at the University of Oregon, Ucci taught while creating her own digital, text, sound and installation art. The works at the Art Gym are a diverse mix of color and light, sound and text, that form poignant statements about the convergence of everyday life and the digital realm. The titular video work, "An Opera For One," is on display in a quiet viewing room. It's best experienced on a slow day when you can lose yourself in the gentle pulse of color without being interrupted. GRAHAM W. BELL.

Through Dec. 5. The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, 17600 Pacific Highway, 699-6243.

Everything Is Water

Using vintage and contemporary imagery inspired by fairytales and fables, artist Melody Owen's pieces are collages of prints that look stolen from Gray's Anatomy (the book), vintage aeronautical reports and diagrams of sea creatures. She says the point of her minimalist, abstract cutaways and collages, is that every action is like a ripple in a pond.



These are her visual interpretations of the wildly different results each action creates. "We are all connected," her tree-clock-egg-eyeball mash up seems to say. KYLA FOSTER. Through Jan. 2. Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 NW 9th Ave., 224-0521.

In the City

Screenprints on glass tiles of everyday objects like dumpsters, mopeds and storefront mannequins by Portland artist Stacey Lynn Smith, Nathan Sandberg's glass and concrete tiles that are dot printed to mimic the unnoticed textures of asphalt and Scottish artist Karlyn

Sutherland's kiln-formed glass rectangles combine at Bullseye Project's In the City collective show. Using urban landscapes as inspiration, the show ranges from Sandberg's "Paver 6"—a small square of concrete lined with cracks—to Smith's screenprints reminiscent of fliers and ads that collage street corners, including things like a canary yellow food truck. Juxtaposed with the detail in Sandberg and Smith's work, Sutherland's clean, 17-inch tall glass rectangles on the wall are a minimalist tribute to the skylines of her home country. KYLA FOSTER. Through Dec. 23. Bullseye Gallery, 300 NW 13th Ave., 227-0222.

Internalized Forms

The Sockeye ad agency studio may seem like an odd venue for a solo show, but its first collaboration with Worksound International makes us hope there's more to come. Jason Vance Dickason's acrylic paintings are abstract with a cool, muted palette that hints at the sobriety of an internal office space. But imaginative shapes and swoops keep the work from appearing too clinical. Most visitors are drawn to the large-scale piece at the front entrance, but the real star is an untitled triptych that's strategically placed on a blank wall and features dark, abstracted window blinds with just a touch of luminous sky peeking through. It's ingenious how these architectural paintings hint at the space around them. HILARY TSAI. Through Feb. 28. Sockeye, 240 N Broadway, Suite 301, 226-3843.

The Last Road North

For five years, Alaska-based photographer Ben Huff traveled along America's northernmost thoroughfare, the Haul Road. Built as a supply route for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the road extends 414 miles and is traversed primarily by truckers transporting supplies to and from the oil fields. Huff is sharing his visual journey, inspired by the captivating Alaskan landscape and the individuals and machines who navigate it. His photographs capture the paradoxes of the Haul Road—beautiful, snowy mountains in the wilderness, juxtaposed with miles of snaking pipeline and abandoned, rusty oil barrels. KYLA FOSTER. Through Jan. 2. Newspace Center for Photography, 1632 SE 10th Ave., 963-1935.

The Liminalists

The simple-looking works, full of bright geometric shapes or sinuous graphite blobs, belie artists Amy Bernstein and Patrick Kelly's strict attention to process and composition. Kelly's graphite forms look like metallic rain clouds, undulating with a shiny sheen, and Bernstein abstract strokes and shapes pop vibrantly off their white backgrounds. Both artists' works stay firmly anchored in two dimensions on their surfaces, but the hues and forms are striking enough they threaten to break through into physical space and hit you in the face. GRAHAM BELL. Nationale, 3360 SE Division St., 477-9786. Through Dec. 4. Nationale, 3360 SE Division St., Free.

Material Evolution: Urban Coyotes, Past and Present

What do a coyote, a metal gate and a Moroccan bird have in common? That's what Mary C. Hinckley investigates in this collection of eye-popping glass and enamel works, now on display at Augen through end of December. Inspired by mosaic traditions and stained glass techniques, these mesmerizing portraits blur the line between collage and sculpture, while the intricate patterns and wild colors hinge on optical illusion. Hinckley's process of fusing bits of glass together into a cohesive image mirrors her attempt at reconciling seemingly disparate objects—a gate and a bird, for example—in order to forge new relationships. HILARY TSAI. Augen Gallery, 716 NW Davis St., 546-5056. Through Dec. 30. Augen Gallery, 716 NW Davis St., Free.

Molly 16's Rock n Roll Fantasy

Honoring a local youth's mark on the rise of punk rock in Portland circa 1990, Molly 16's Rock n Roll Fantasy is a multimedia sidecar to the Pacific Northwest College of Art's Alien She exhibit, which centers on Bikini Kill. Molly 16 grew up in group homes in Portland in the '90s, singing in an all-girl band and critiquing society in her Rock n Roll Fantasy zine. She did the cover art for Bikini Kill's debut album, but later took her own life. This exhibit of archival videos, animations and music—curated by Molly's best friend, filmmaker Amber Dawn—is an homage to Molly and her Fantasy. ENID SPITZ. Collection Studies Lab, 511 NW Broadway, 917-324-3179. Through Jan. 29.

Seeing Nature

The only reason these works from Paul G. Allen Family Foundation aren't in the art history books is because they haven't been in a public collection. Some might be disappointed that none of the pieces are recognizable masterworks, but that's precisely what makes this show so important. Viewing a private collection is like unlocking a hidden room of art history—these are gems secreted away from the rest of the world that are now brought to light. We see Cézanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire, Monet's water lilies and the explosive power of Voltaire's Vesuvius, but also the fleshy flora of O'Keeffe and the blurry photo paintings of Richter. GRAHAM W. BELL. Through Jan. 10. Portland Art Museum, 1219 SW Park Ave., 226-2811.

Shifting Migrations

This series of new etchings and woodcuts by Oregon-based printmaker Tallmadge Doyle exists at the crux between science and nature. Bold, luminous silhouettes of Pacific Northwest flora draw the eye in, then lead it out to where patterns of delicate line work hint at the unseen energy that connects all living things. Some etchings are heavily abstracted, while others have the true-to-life, drawn quality of a botanist's illustration. Each piece speaks as much for Doyle's thoughtful and meditative process as it does for the finished product. HILARY TSAI. Through Dec. 30. Augen Gallery, 716 NW Davis St., 546-5056.

Throw Me the Idol I Throw You the Whip



In between ribbons of explosive color, we glimpse the painting's surface. Introducing a new dose of illusionism into his paintings, the works in *Throw Me The Idol I Throw You The Whip* are all about layers. Each swath of color roils over the other in a frenetic dance, but the real prize is that bit of mottled surface peeks through the composition. Once seen, that bit acts as a keyhole to unlock the illusionary space created by Hottle and give the works a whole new depth. Pieces like "Once So High Now Below," one of the largest in the show, exhibit clean patches of red and white that seem to hover over a scumbled, stained background. Others, like "Stolen Kiss" and "Bury Me In Black," strip away the

swirl of shapes and make that underlayer the focal point, while drawing allusions to the frottage of Max Ernst and the smoky seduction of the Northwest School. GRAHAM W. BELL. Through Dec. 13. Carl & Sloan Contemporary, 8371 N Interstate Ave., No. 1, 360-608-9746.

Winter Group

Charles A. Hartman presents a small group of pigment prints, paintings and mixed media collage from four artists covering a range of subjects like domestic life, outdoor recreation and racial commentary. Each artist is a veteran, with at least one solo exhibition at Charles A. Hartman in recent years. Together, their eclectic interests make a show that's remarkably diverse for such a modest selection. HILARY TSAI. Through Jan. 30. Charles A. Hartman Fine Art, 134 NW 8th Ave., 287-3886.

Visual Artist Melody Owen Makes Waves

corvallisadvocate.com/2017/visual-artist-melody-owen-makes-waves

January 26, 2017

A recent Portland transplant, artist and graduate student Melody Owen is already making waves in the Corvallis art scene, having just opened a gallery next to her studio space downtown to exhibit some of our area's most prominent artists—including Anna Fidler, Julia Bradshaw, Julie Green, and more—all in protest of the misogynist-ridden Trump administration.

The *Nasty Woman* exhibit opened last Thursday and will continue to show for another two weeks at Optic Gallery at 225 SW Madison Avenue. The gallery will remain open for as long as Owen can afford it, however, her main focus these days is in her studies, which I had the opportunity of learning about when sitting down with her recently.

Roots

Originally from Eugene, Owen has travelled and lived in many places across the globe, including New York, San Francisco, Quebec, and Paris. Early on, Owen dabbled in theater and written word, before making the transition to conceptual art. "I was frustrated with the form of writing poetry," she said. "I wanted to make it in the real world, instead of just writing down images."

Now working toward her master's degree, Owen has gotten back into writing as an art form. "I kind of see all mediums as possibilities," she noted.

Owen uses mixed media in her conceptual art work, incorporating various forms such as video, collage, and room installations. Owen's work is represented by the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, where it's available for purchase, and has been covered in Artforums—two noteworthy accomplishments in the world of art.



Inside the Studio

Owen's studio is like a breath of fresh air. As we speak, I sit sipping tea amongst far-reaching plants and stacks of books in a baby-blue chair, beside a window overlooking the streets of downtown Corvallis. The books are related to Owen's studies; she's the lucky recipient of a full scholarship for a brand new graduate program at OSU: Environmental Arts and Humanities.



The Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative was created to bring science and humanities scholars together to creatively collaborate over environmental issues, and to focus on how to live mindfully and justifiably in our world today.

As a “poor artist and a poor graduate student,” Owen manages to remain enriched in her passions of animal rights and art. She hasn't quite figured out her thesis yet, but over the course of the next two years plans to further study cognitive ethology, or the science of animal thoughts and behaviors. She believes that animals are intelligent creatures and is interested in the ways they communicate.

Owen often incorporates animal sounds in her artwork. She created a 30-foot *Bird Song Chandelier* which hangs in The Nines hotel in Portland. Made with LED lights and blown glass, Owen created visual representations of various song waves made by endangered birds in Oregon. She's also created a 3D wooden representation of a whale song during a residency in Quebec.

So, why all the intricate dynamic work for little pay? “Just because I don't know how else to live,” said Owen. “It's the way I go through life. It's the path that I'm on.”

About Owen's Art

Owen draws inspiration from punk rock, movies like *Alice in Wonderland*, and art and books from the 1920s through 1940s. Her creative process is “a matter of a lot of research and thinking and collecting.”

Owen lists another source of inspiration being life's poetic moments. “As an artist you want to translate or represent it in some way,” she explained.

Along with many of her friends, Owen has been influenced by artists such as Sophie Calle, Ann Hamilton, Kiki Smith, David Lynch, Jim Jarmusch, Terry Gilliam, Diane Arbus, Tom Waits, Reggie Watts, Marcel Dzama, and Jon Rafman.

Owen's work ranges in complexity, but not in evocation. She's displayed anything from an engraved jungle vine to jarring collaged postcards to podiums of stacked library cards. Some of her favorite room installations include a floor covered in stacks of pennies, and a room filled with hummingbird feeders with interlocking rings.

Owen takes note of the struggles in the art world. “Sometimes I don't succeed,” she admitted. “I accept that as part of making things.”

What to Expect Next

Currently, Owen is working on virtual installations using the platform Second Life, where people can create avatars, along with buildings and places that are modeled after real life or made of pure fantasy.

“There's so much potential, even though it's a bizarre, dead world there,” she said.

Within the virtual world there is OSU Island, complete with a virtual MU. Owen plans on working with the university and creating her art and gallery as it is in the real world.

“I'll probably do some kind of interchange between reality... and just what reality is and how what we think about reality is what creates reality,” Owen explained.

Other upcoming events include a *Boathouse Microcinema* show of boathouse artists on Feb. 15, and a Lane County Historical Society talk on human/tree portraiture on March 18.



For more information on upcoming events and Melody Owen's work, visit <https://melodyowen.net/>. To purchase her artwork, visit <http://www.elizabethleach.com/Artist-Detail.cfm?ArtistsID=126>. To see posts made by Owen on what inspires her, visit <http://dodocurio.tumblr.com/>. For more information on OSU's Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative, visit <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/centers-and-initiatives/environmental-arts-and-humanities-initiative>.

By Stevie Beisswanger

Oregon ArtsWatch

oregon arts and culture

Down the rabbit hole: Melody Owen makes a book



A strange little rabbit: Illustration from Melody Owen's "Looking Glass Book"

“My Dear Friends and Comrades,” the email read. “Happy The New Year! Please come and join me in Celebrating the Completion and Release of a Book I Made!”

The invitation, which was signed “Your friend and mine, Melody Owen,” was too intriguing to resist. So on a rainy Portland Friday evening I slipped into a waterproof jacket and headed to a little concrete triangulation just off of West Burnside Street where the headquarters of a small publishing empire called Publication Studio sits.

Outside the big-windowed storefront on upper Ankeny Street, which at this eastern juncture is really little more than a wisp of a lane, the air was chill. Inside it was warm and comforting, the kind of sudden warm that fogs your glasses, and as my lenses were clearing back into sight I was greeted with an even warmer smile by Patricia No, one of three people (along with David Knowles and Matthew Stadler) who keep the place running.

“Welcome!” No said brightly, seeming genuinely pleased to have a visitor even though things were running a little behind and the space was still being set up for the evening’s event. Ambient musician Alexis Gideon was fiddling with plug-ins and outlets. No was spreading printed materials onto a table. Owen, the somewhat hesitant star of the show, was checking over the beer and wine supply and looking around expectantly.

I had never met Melody, although I’ve followed her work for several years, at least since the 2001 Oregon Biennial, in which her long wide tablescape *Crowns*, a fairy-tale concoction of white-paper cutouts stapled and joined into a pristine meadow of delicate rises and falls, stood

out as a distinctly personal vision. Since then I've seen photographs and videos and sculptures, including one in the shape of a narwhal tusk that was fashioned from a Borneo vine.

I've also been intrigued by her collages, comfortably home-feeling yet highly accomplished and imaginative pieces that are often of animals in odd alterations, and often convey a sense of quiet urgency over the animals' precarious position in the human-manipulated order of things: She's also published a small collaborative volume called *The Disappearing Book*, which, as she wrote in her introduction to it, "attempts to address the marvelous nature of some of the many things that are disappearing from the world." Her art has struck me as both small and surprisingly large. It whispers rather than shouts, but what it whispers has outsized implications. Her work seems very much at the fulcrum between private and public intention.



Tea and turtle: from "Looking Glass Book"

Owen has an eye for the fantastical that's inherent in the ordinary of the natural world. Her art has long carried wonderland implications. The book whose birth she was celebrating on this night, [Looking Glass Book](#), makes those implications explicit. In it, she's assembled a selection of collages created from twenty years' worth of printed material (most of it old copies of *National Geographic*) to illustrate passages from Lewis Carroll's 1865 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and 1871 *Through the Looking-Glass*. As captivating as the original John Tenniel illustrations are, Owen's collages have their own studied and quirky charm, and they have the conceptual advantage of stepping into the forefront: Instead of supporting the stories, snippets of the stories support them.

"These books have always been really important to me," Owen explained as the room began to fill with friends, relatives, and assorted artists and other gallery-world people. "I collect foreign-language editions of them. I pretty much knew them by heart as a child. I learned a lot from them. Philosophically."

When she was young, she listened over and over to Cyril Ritchard's recordings of the books, gathering in the actor's rhythms and the author's dramatic tone. She bemoans the oversimplifications of the Disney version, which conflates the two books into a single animated film. Much better, and also darker and truer, she declares, is *Alice*, a 1988 film adaptation by the Czech animator Jan Švankmajer.

Owen speaks in a quiet, high-pitched voice interrupted by small fissures that give it lightness and lift. It's a sailing, aerodynamic surprise of a voice, like Melanie Griffith's in *Working Girl*, and, fittingly, it's melodious. She's tall and straight-shouldered, with bright bobbed hair and a sturdy Great Plains stance that grounds her voice. She seems both exotic and plainspoken: Ariel, but also [Caddie Woodlawn](#).

As exotic and intricate as the reproductions are in *Looking Glass Book*, you couldn't tell it from the cover, which is a simple bright blue, like the blue of office paper stock. Publication Studio's walls are lined with narrow shelves that hold copies of dozens of books the studio has published, including the likes of *Gobshite Quarterly*, Anne Focke's *A Pragmatic Response to Real Circumstances*, Oregon artist D.E. May's *The Template Files*, and tattoo artist Dan Gilsdorf's *Ad Absurdum*.

There's a picture book of work by legendary Portland calligrapher and teacher Lloyd Reynolds, including some of his brightly grinning puppets, from a retrospective at Reed College: inside a plain green cover distinguished by an elegant watermark, it's gorgeous. The proof for a fat visual history of New York City, beginning with a portrait of Henry Hudson with a pencil-pointed beard that makes him look very much like Sir Walter Raleigh, weighs down a section of one shelf. On almost all of these books the aesthetic is plain wrapper, although not usually brown: green, tan, purple, red, lots of blues.

Publication Studio is not the sort of place you happen upon unless you're in the habit of poking through territories where things that people happen upon might exist. Scant yards away around the corner, where the low-rent residential Stewart Hotel and Mary's Club All Nude Revue melt toward the city's upscale financial and retail districts, the bustle of Broadway honks and hustles away. Here, in the soft shadows along Ankeny, people eat and drink inside small antique spaces where the buildings on either side of the walkway almost touch at their tops and the night air seems to shimmer in a gaslight glow. This little slant of alley, left over from the days when topography rather than bureaucratic fiat defined the shape of urban passages, is a ghost of a place – a jostling anachronism along the fault line where the stamped-down grids of Northwest and Southwest Portland don't quite meet. Ankeny is a tuckaway; if not precisely a rabbit hole then certainly a warren, hidden from most eyes.

It's fitting that Publication Studio, a high-energy but low-profile imprint that claims somewhat mysteriously to be "a maker and destroyer of books," is tucked away here. And it's fitting that an artist of Owen's secret-door inclinations should find it a congenial home for some of her work.

The studio was created in 2009 by No and Stadler, an essayist, publisher ([Clear Cut Press](#)), energetic cultural catalyst and novelist: His [Chloe Jarren's *La Cucaracha*](#), built on an elaborate structural mapping of John Le Carré's novel *A Murder of Quality* and released by Publication Studio, is a finalist for this year's Oregon Book Awards. The house's printing approach is low-

tech and old-fashioned but also virtual, creating online meeting places and sponsoring in-the-flesh events. It prints its books on demand (“We thought, ‘How can we make this work with no money?’” No explains), and although it can offer its authors a range of technical niceties, the prevailing ethos seems to be stripped-down and plain: It threatens no coffee tables with collapsing under the weight of lushly produced eye candy.

It’s spawned a looseknit sisterhood of similar publishing houses in Toronto and Vancouver, Canada; Berkeley; and a roving studio that pops up here, there, and the next place across the Midwest. Each house operates on its own, but all of their output is available from any of the others. Looking through the studio’s volumes, you get a double-sided sense of purpose: (1) actually existing in print is extremely important; (2) print should be stripped to its basics, so that reading a text becomes an essential exercise, with no distractions.



A hat with that: from "Looking Glass Book"

So it is, in a way, with Owen’s collages, which in one sense seem nothing but whimsical and decorative, yet when seen in a different light – through the filter of the rabbit hole – become essential precisely because of their disorienting oddity. Like Carroll’s weirdly logical little stories they reflect back, at an acute and telling angle, on the received assumptions that the “ordinary” world on the surface deems important.

For Owen, transforming this collection of collages into book form presented some conceptual challenges. When she created the collages she found herself fascinated not just by the images she chose to put together but also by their backsides – their mirror images, so to speak: the other sides of the pages she’d cut out from magazines, which took on their own accidental associations. Rather than paste her cutouts on a plain backing, she chose to encase the collages in

clear glass, so that viewers could see both the intended images on the front side and the unintentional images on the back.

She could have repeated that process in the book, but it wasn't economically practical. Instead, she printed each pair of images on facing pages: the "real" collage on the left hand, the "accidental" – and therefore more abstract – collage on the right. The shapes are the same. The content isn't.

If that sounds somehow radical, it's also radically conservative: even, in a nonpolitical sense, reactionary. Existing by chronological accident in a virtual age (which she manipulates casually and easily through her emails and Web site), Owen is also, and maybe more essentially, a firm believer in the value and beauty of the tactile. Her art is made up of real physical materials rearranging real space. It has ideas, of course, and in that sense is conceptual. But its biggest idea is: This object *is*. Her belief in the importance of the touchable, I suspect, fuels her urgency over the vanishing from the natural world of so much that so recently was real. And if it takes imaginary creatures to remind us of what's being lost ... well, that's real, too.

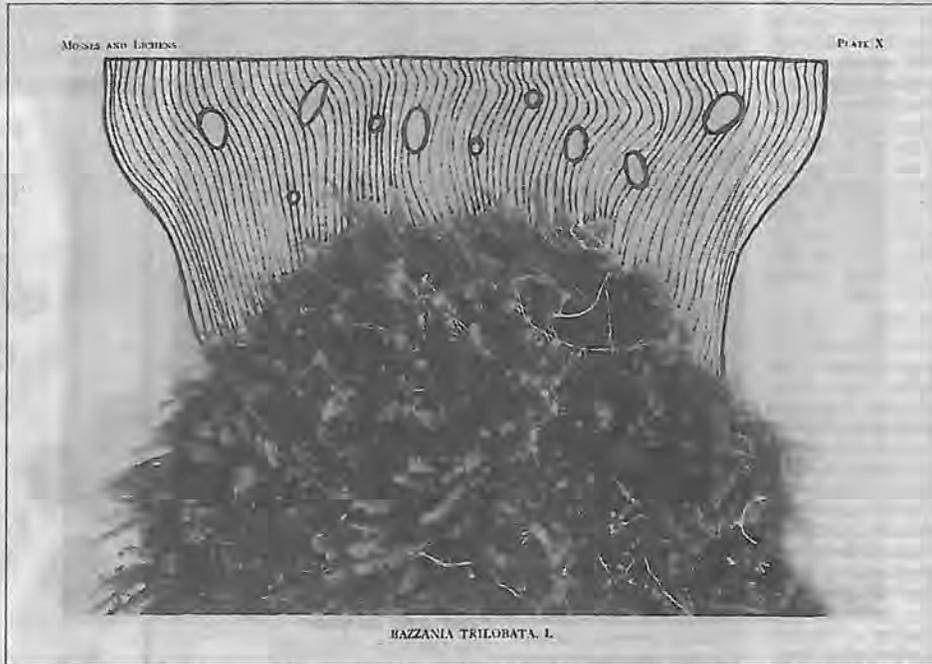
"Kids look at everything on Google, and ... I don't know; I don't get it," Owen said, sounding more elder-statesmanly than she looks. "I just love books. I don't know how people read them on a Kindle. It's not the same."

That would be physical books, with physical pages that you touch and feel and turn. And it would be, at least much of the time, books whose primary purpose is simply to be, because on some small level, they should.

Big publishing houses continue to push for the next best seller. Galleries keep the apparatus of artistic economics spinning along. But as the mainstream surges forward, little pieces continue to tumble off, like pioneers in both the experimental and nostalgic senses of the word, busily reinventing the wheel in shapes and sizes suited to more esoteric terrain. Off the superhighway your wheels might get stuck in a rut, or you might end up on the milk train to Wonderland.

Maybe Michael J. Fox had it right. Maybe we really are going back to the future. And maybe Melody Owen's headed in both directions at once.

For the meek, a considered look



"The World Underneath Understanding," drawing on book page by Melody Owen.

By **BOB HICKS**
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

The meek have been waiting a long time to inherit the Earth, and things are looking a little dicey. By the time they get it, will anything be left?

The question pops up inescapably from a couple of gallery shows by Portland artist Melody Owen this month: "So Close to the Glass and Shivering" at The Art Gym, and "Letters From Switzerland" at Elizabeth Leach Gallery. (She's also part of a group show at White Cube in the White Stag Building; a busy, busy March.)

Owen's art isn't meek, although it's far from muscle-bound or flashy. It's provisional and considered — *studied*, without being static. And

in these exhibits it is partly considering the nature and fate of those among us who are not powerful, who are on the receiving end of mammoth forces set off in more assertive quarters.

Most of these meek beings, as it turns out, are of different species, and that adds an edge of the unknowable. So close to the glass, just beyond reach. Owen refers to her Art Gym exhibit as "quiet ruminations on whales and exploration," and you see its shivering unknowability perhaps most potently in a series of short videos, including ones of a leopard and a beluga whale, each seen clasp behind glass: moving, shifting, staring. Viewer and subject

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if you go

Melody Owen: Two Shows

Where: The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, 17600 Pacific Highway (about two miles south of Lake Oswego)

Hours: Noon-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays

Closes: April 9

Admission: Free

Contact: 503-699-6243, www.marylhurst.edu/theartgym

Where: Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays

Closes: March 27

Admission: Free

Contact: 503-224-0521, www.elizabethleach.com

are nose to nose, and utterly separated. It's like watching the beginning of a television nature show and waiting for the predictable voice-over narration, then realizing there isn't one: The animal is its own story.

The Art Gym exhibit includes some quietly gorgeous pieces that feel like remnants of something lost: a Borneo vine carved and sanded to look like a narwhal tusk; "Stranded Whale," a white-painted stainless-steel sculpture that looks like a three-dimensional police outline of where the body was found.

Other ghosts are here, too — a series of small light boxes with images projected over pre-existing people and places; the large digital color prints that make up "Postcard Carvings": strange insertions of billowy roots or cords clamping down dreamy travel-magazine scenes.

Owen's show at Elizabeth Leach, including many works stemming from a residency last year in Aurau, Switzerland, repeats some of the Art Gym themes and continues her ruminations on the predicament of animals coping with the effects of human decisions. The color inkjet print "Pigeon Caught in Pharmacy," for instance, is a terrific, terrifying photo of a bird flapping against a ceiling, trapped and not quite sure why it can't rise.

But the exhibit's most interesting moments rise from two sets of Dada-inspired collages that extend Owen's contemplation of animals and humans into elusive territory.

One grouping seems all about elegance, balance and space — how shapes and colors interact within a frame. But the subjects are interesting: antique luxury cars and buses; brilliantly cut jewels; things out of place. They hint at the differences between the wild and the tame; between a thing being, and a thing being used. One is titled "Man Swallows Whale Swallows Diamond." In another, a tiger on the prowl stares with ruby eyes, echoing a cascade of rubies into a wine chalice. In a third, a small elephant is balanced precariously atop a bigger elephant balanced atop some slender strands of vegetation that couldn't possibly hold its weight, and you get the feeling that, yes, that's about

how tenuously these creatures' lives hang in the balance.

The second series, the strangely riveting "Drought in Kenya," is elegantly simple. Onto well-printed pages of index or register from old books, Owen adds carefully manipulated images of animals — zebra, dolphin, penguin, kangaroo, swan, tiger, water buffalo. They're not all animals you'd expect in Kenya, but they're all in the same boat: Each has a pie-slice taken from its midsection to reveal its innards. One bird, maybe a quail, seems to have flowers for insides. The penetration doesn't seem to bother the beasts, which maintain a calm equilibrium, but you wonder: How do they survive?

This is far from the sensationalism and commodifying of Damien Hirst's sliced-and-diced cows in formaldehyde. Owen's collages are formally lovely and ripple with questions of nature, place and survival. They wonder. They stimulate. They prod without preaching. And maybe they're quiet, but that's not meek.

Bob Hicks is a Portland freelance writer; bobhicks5@gmail.com

ARTslant

Melody Owen's Dada-damaged Collage

by John Motley

Letters from Switzerland

Elizabeth Leach Gallery

March 4, 2010 - March 27, 2010



In the past few years, Portland artist Melody Owen has participated in so many artist-in-residency programs that it has become an integrated aspect of her practice: She travels to make work and, in turn, makes work about the travel. Yet her output—sculpture, video, drawings, collage—resists the superficial glance of a rootless tourist. If the imagery we encounter in *Letters from Switzerland*, made during a 2009 residency in Aarau, Switzerland, is occasionally alien or exotic, it is not presented with the passing interest of a cursory visitor. One senses an anthropological investment in her subjects, as she immerses herself in the cultures of the countries she visits to decipher their most potent symbols and visual signifiers, to adopt a new way of seeing.



For "Letters...", Owen primarily works in collage, altering indigenous source material, from books to print ads. In the *Drought in Kenya* series, she places black-and-white illustrations of various animals—a zebra, kangaroo, dolphin, etc.—atop indexical pages from a German-language book, emphasizing sections on "Botanik" and "Zoologie." This connection between flora and fauna is explained as each animal is halved, like a Russian doll, exposing bursts of red and pink flowers where viscera should be. Fascinatingly, the rosy floral hues scan as the pallor of raw meat, delaying the reveal that Owen's animals are petal-stuffed piñatas.

Importantly, Owen's use of collage extends an art historical link to the geography she inhabited during the residency, nodding to Dada's origins in the dark, liquory confines of the Caberet Voltaire in Zurich. The best work in *Letters*—a series of collages titled *The New Universe*, 2009—show the artist working in a convincingly Dadaist mode, trusting her instincts to lead her places calculation couldn't. Each piece in the series focuses on a single color and consists of images from disparate visual lexicons: animal skulls, trains and ocean liners, glittering jewels, and arcane technical and anatomical illustrations. By consistently employing the same types of images, the series begins to feel like a deck of playing cards being shuffled over and over, recording each head-scratching permutation.



In *The New Universe: Night Train*, 2009, we see down the long corridor of a luxurious train car. Two rows of seated passengers, well-dressed and jovial, read magazines and chat. It's a prim view of travel by rail. Well, except for the woman who sprouts enormous talons from her coat sleeve. Or the woman who stares at the pair of flippers dwarfing her lap. Or the man behind her who entertains a swarm of giant amber-colored gems. All the same ingredients pop up in *The New Universe: The Projectionist (Gold)*, 2009, but the mood dims, morphing from absurd to creepy. Here, an image of an archaeologist holding up a monstrously large, curving incisor with two hands is embedded into a lavishly cushioned and colorful bedroom interior. A gold disc blots out his face while a cadre of hovering emeralds sketches out a gloriole around his head. It's hard not to ask questions about this figure: Is he a big game hunter? An occult spiritualist? Such concrete interpretations aren't what Owen has in mind; the territory she's exploring is disorienting and splintered, but she speaks its language fluently.

-John Motley

So Close to the Glass and Shivering, a survey of Owen's previous work, is concurrently on display at the Art Gym at Marylhurst University, through April 9th.

All images courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery. *Melody Owen, Drought in Kenya: Zebra*, 2009, collage, 11.75 x 8.5" framed; *The New Universe: Night Train*, 2009, collage, 16.25 x 16.25" framed; *The New Universe: The Projectionist (Gold)*, 2009, collage, 16.25 x 16.25" framed

MELODY OWEN by Jacquelyn Davis

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland OR

July 3 • August 2, 2008

Making a literal virtue of X marks the spot, Melody Owen's "Alexandria, I'm Waiting" presents works produced during residencies at Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, France; Gil Society in Akureyri, Iceland; and Centre Est-Nord-Est, Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, Canada. Comprising photographs, videos, sculpture, and collages, Owen's exhibition arose in response to various local materials and myths. Among her bizarre 2007-08 Icelandic series of collages, we see a blond-haired girl clutching a kitten while a huge, parasitic Rafflesia flower blooms malevolently out of her mouth (*Friða og Snotra*), based on local stories about elves switching out human babies for their own. Another treatment on the theme of changelings, *49, mynd* shows an anatomical diagram of a man with a hawk perched on his arm, drawing similarities between the venous branches and avian feathers. *Shape of Smoke*, a column made up of different plumes of smoke, looks remarkably like the outline of a penis.

Owen's travels into latitudinal similitude definitely make your head spin. As she admits, "I feel like one of those quarters you spin on a table, the kind that keeps spinning long after you thought it would stop." *Travel Grid #2* (2008) is a case in point, scouring through such diverse locales as Berlin, Guanajuato, Quebec, and Portland to arrive at arresting scenes of the innate knotting of things. Taking her cue from Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-60), Owen explores notions of relativity and continuum breathed through with alternate perspectives on the same subject-object relations, like those hashish-ridden lines: "Mountolive's ear aches, Liza's blindness, Clea's amputated hand, Leila's smallpox, Justine's stroke, Pombal's gout." Thus, too, Owen's prints of huge cargo ships and hotels from Mediterranean climes clouded over with masses of hive-like cellular grids, such as *Hotel #1 (Tokyo)* and *Hotel #3 (Ship)* (both 2005), suggesting uncanny parallels



between natural and human forms of cohabitation.

In a similar play on the insinuation of worlds, Owen's ink *Seed Drawings* (2004) compare teeming fallopian tubes with open tents, broken beds, and brimming bathtubs, leaving implied sexual determinations up in the air. Nothing, in fact, escapes this morphological uniformity in difference. For instance, *Beluga Soundwave* (2007) is a 3-D translation in wood of a beluga whale song. *8-Knot* (2007), on the other hand, elegantly interweaves two old snowshoes in the eponymous shape. These uncharted identities really spin out of control after a while, causing doubt and indecision over the most humdrum of arrangements. As the title of the show suggests, Owen's Durrellian switcheroos portend a world just like Alexandria, "the city which used us as its flora—precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own."



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Lilla hafmeyjan.
GULL

MELODY OWEN

www.thistlepress.net

Portland, Oregon

While living in Paris, I purchased the Alexandria Quartet by Lawrence Durrell. Reading the book, I felt the "idea of Egypt" leak into my Paris experience. Egypt was in the smog and slipping, like a shadow, down the Seine. It was in dregs of wine and hidden between book pages in the bouquinistes stalls.

I lived in a few very different places in a short period of time, and I thought a lot about the idea of place: What a place brings out in a person and what a person brings out in a place. How much of a place, especially one like Paris or Iceland, pre-exists like a small stage set in the mind and how it changes when you find yourself actually immersed in the reality of it.

I lived in Iceland for one month, Quebec for two months and Paris for five. In each place, I was a stranger. I stood at a safe distance but felt raw and happy, and really sad. I changed my practice in

continued on page 36 >

at left:

gold mermaid (gull hafmeyjan)

hand-cut collage

5" x 7.5"

2007

this page, clockwise:

crown (hvítá í borgarfirði)

7.5" x 5"

hand-cut collage

2007

viking teeth (hvalfjörður)

7.5" x 5"

hand-cut collage

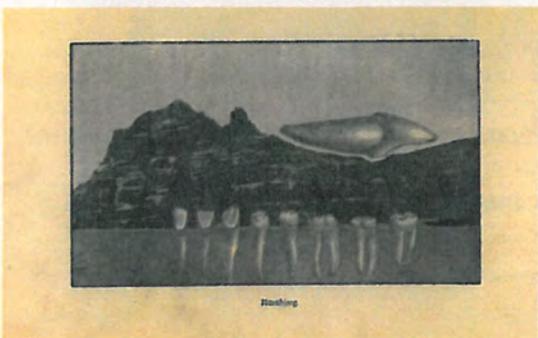
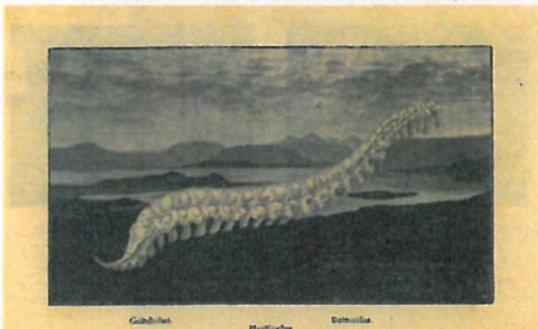
2007

sea monster (hornbjarg)

7.5" x 5"

hand-cut collage

2007



“ I changed my practice in each place, depending on the tools and materials available...

each place, depending on the tools and materials available, and tried my best to let something of the place seep into or speak through me.

In Iceland, I made three sets of collages from books I found at a library sale and a bookstore. All the books were in Icelandic. In each series, I combined two books. In one, I integrated plants from a science book into a religious book for children. Here, I was thinking about the stories of elves that are told in and about Iceland. There is a sense of them there, in the lava landscapes and the strange light of midnight. The children in the collage become elven changelings.

There is an abundance of literature in Iceland, and the sagas feel very close. Much of the land is named after heroes and stories from the old Viking myths. One set of collages examines this, the way that the stories of the people are so tightly woven together with the natural environment and landscape.

To cut the collages, I used a large pair of scissors that I found in the studio at The Gil Society, where I had my residency in Akureyri. There was a nick in the scissors which made it difficult to cut, but I used them anyway. The photographs in the grid were taken in Guanajuato, Paris, Berlin, Iceland, Quebec and Portland, Oregon. □



above:

Travel Grid #2

16" x 22" digital prints

wall of 9

2008

right:

Pang!

hand-cut collage

5" x 7.5"

June 2007



Pang! Örin þaut af streng. Rósa ljómaði öll og reyndi einu sinni enn.

...and tried my best to let something
of the place seep into or speak through me. ”

VISUALARTS

Portland Mercury, July 17, 2008



If it seems like an ice age since Melody Owen last exhibited in Portland, her new solo exhibition at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, *Alexandria, I'm Waiting*, goes a long way to explaining why. Consisting largely of work Owen completed during three artist residencies (more of which is concurrently on display in the Case Works at Reed College's library), this understated show reveals just how much those destinations—Paris; Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, Quebec; and Akureyri, Iceland—influenced the resulting pieces. And while imagery from these regions dominates the photographs, collages, and video included here, it combines for a fragmented look at place, speaking to wanderlust and the elusive nature of memory more than any of the specific locales.

The exhibition's photographs, which span the past four years, feature many literal signifiers of travel, from mid-flight snapshots of an airplane wing to the blurred thrust of a bright red streetcar. But Owen also intersperses images that speak to travel metaphorically, its tiny discoveries and



VISUAL ART

sense of infinite wonder: a delicate bunch of pink wildflowers or a view of a green tool shed, largely obstructed by gleaming icicles. In her numerous collages, Owen uses the media's inherent discourse of scrambled contexts as a reference to the tourist's displacement. Thus an isolated spinal column, like some hulking beast, stalks across a newsprint image of an Icelandic fjord. In a suite of collages featuring cherubic Icelandic children, that sense of displacement morphs into unsettling disorientation. In one, a little girl innocently cradles a kitten—and a bulbous red mushroom sprouts out of her mouth like a speech bubble.



The image is of August 11th, with the scene as captured from a video camera.

Melody Owen

Alexandria, I'm Waiting

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417
NW 9th, through August 2

In the end, *Alexandria, I'm Waiting* is as scattered and impressionistic as a photo album. Its pieces function as souvenirs, a kind of short-hand for the memories they attempt to embody. But Owen acknowledges this limitation, as well. In the readymade sculpture "8-knot," she inverts a pair of snowshoes, likely acquired as a memento in Iceland, and entwines their looping toes to create a figure eight—or an infinity symbol. In travel, there's redemption for even the most mundane artifacts as they're seen by fresh eyes. That even a pair of snowshoes could inspire the infinite awe of the tourist gets at one of art's most basic aims, exposing profound universality where we'd least expect it. JOHN MOTLEY

COOLEY

TWO EXHIBITIONS
& VERY SPECIAL EVENTS

July 17

CASE WORKS ARTIST **MELODY OWEN**
speaks about her work and her recent
exhibitions at Reed College
and the Elizabeth Leach Gallery

7:00 p.m.
Reed College Theater

July 19

A COOLEY GALLERY COMMISSION
Members of the Flash Choir perform
a new choral work by **SARAH DOUGHER**
based on the work of
Robert Duncan and Jess

Followed by a special lecture
Eye of the Ear: Jess and the Poets
By **STEVE DICKISON**
Director of the Poetry Center and
American Poetry Archives at
San Francisco State University
7:00 p.m.
Reed College Chapel

FOLLOWED BY A RECEPTION
ON THE REED COLLEGE LAWN
MUSICAL GUEST **TIM DUROCHE**

Image:
Melody Owen, *Pang!*, 2007
Hand-cut collage, Iceland, 7 x 5 in.
Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland



**Pang! Örín þaut af streng. Rósa ljómaði öll og reyndi
einu sinni enn.**

MELODY OWEN / CASE WORKS 14
"... useless, incorruptible, secret"

June 10 – July 20, 2008

Reed College Library

Summer hours: Monday–Thursday: 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Friday: 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Jess: To and From the Printed Page



Jess: To and From the Printed Page, is a traveling exhibition organized and circulated by ICI (Independent Curators International), New York. Guest curator for the exhibition is Ingrid Schaffner. The exhibition, tour, and catalogue are made possible, in part, by grants from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the ICI Exhibition Partners.

May 9 – July 20, 2008

Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery
Reed College

3203 SE Woodstock Blvd., Portland, Oregon | Hours: Tuesday–Sunday 12–5 pm | www.reed.edu/gallery

ON OTHERS

NASHVILLE

In the exhibition *On Others* (University Art Gallery, Sewanee, August 19—October 9, 2005; Rhodes Collage, Memphis, October 21—December 7, 2005; Iron Gate Studios, Austin, January 13—29, 2006), artist-turned-curator Greg Pond juxtaposed works by five artists from around the country to underscore commonalities. Pond's curatorial premise thus relies on the relationships between pieces, which reveal themselves in the exhibition.

Steven Thompson's works reflect this exhibition-complex, and recalls something out of a history museum. Ritual costumes and everyday garb are hung scarecrow-style in his work. *The Aegis of the Green and Bold Cooperative*, 2005, Massive, the crème-colored felt attire hangs feet above the average human head. Its large felt and button eyes float on the hood's exterior, appearing as empty as the skeletal structure used to hold it up. Sharp graphite lines reveal the artist's patterning of each sewn piece. Thompson makes us wonder how much we believe in the history he is illustrating through these objects.

Patrick DeGuira's *Precarious Stack*, 2005, is a mixed media installation that reads as the meeting of Dr. Seuss with Dr. Ruth. Ten sets of mint green teacups are stacked, and rest on a pristine red book entitled *The Joy of Sex*. In turn, the book sits atop a white folding chair. The tower's impossible balance suggests a playful and awkward approach to fornication. How does one reach ecstasy without upsetting the gallantry of love?

Melody Owen's videos rework iconic clips from black and white films. One work, which she describes as a movie rather than a video, shows the MGM studio's opening sequence with the enormous lion head opening its mouth to roar. Instead of an audio effect, the lion expels small colored heart, diamond, and jewel medallions that disappear after dancing across the screen. Her video *Waiting With Guns*, appropriates clips from classic movies where distraught characters are waiting in dark corners and dusty rock formations for the other's arrival. Isolating these ominous moments, the work suspends viewers in a constant yet indeterminate present. It focuses on the emotion of that immediacy, and on waiting, a suspension similar to the time we have recently experienced with our invasion of Iraq.

Jack Dingo Ryan's small and intimate drawings are similarly absurdist. On unspooled white paper Ryan

depicts scenes reminiscent of a Samuel Beckett play—minimal objects in minimal environments. Mylar is layered over paper in some of pieces, making the work feel even more ethereal. In the graphite drawing *Untitled*, 2005, two small tree stumps cast their shadows and reveal two perfectly rendered holes, the size of owls' eyes. These holes anthropomorphize the stumps, turning them into characters who appear to look in opposite directions, out into the vast peripheral space. The close proximity of these two guard-like creatures also ironically suggests their inability to see each other.

Greg Pond, the exhibition's curator, offers a strange assortment of colloquial sounds and universal symbols in his installations. The desiring search for the exotic—a pastime of most postmodernists—is always evident in his work. Pond's vocabulary juxtaposes audio concoctions with patterned architectural structures and obtrusive kitsch. His work also focuses on the understanding of time afforded by ceremony. In *Sugar Candy Mountain, The Final Resting Place For Saint T*, 2005, Pond draws on fictional post-apocalyptic places to suggest how the future will be remembered. The audio component—a looped audio clip of a chant taken out of sequence and synthesized—is played through a series of small speakers, intermixed with cheap plastic flowers that seem organically grafted to a decorative metal structure. The audio droning recalls the feeling of numbness often experienced in ritual practices such as funerals.

The curator's effort to tease a commonality out of the work through its juxtaposition may succeed at some level. It seems, however, more desired and produced than inherent to the exhibition. While thematic shows often highlight dialogues between the works assembled, this show also points to history's reliance on fiction and fantasy.

—Julie Roberts

one review

MELODY OWEN'S CLING

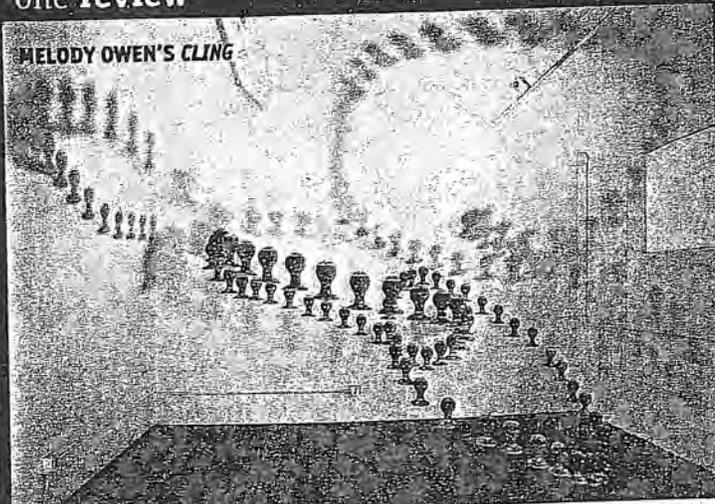
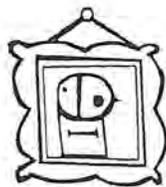


PHOTO BY BASSEL CHILDERS

PORTLAND CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CULTURE This is the 2003 Oregon Biennial. This *Modern Zoo*, this rambling, cavernous 100,000 square feet of art arcing from astounding to awful and back again, is a snapshot of the current moment. Like May's *The Best Coast*, it's far more poignant than the Portland Art Museum's blocky, would-be blockbuster. The *Zoo* is a testament to the endlessly intriguing variations in which the creative spirit manifests itself when you give a hundred people free space and free rein. PCAC, which will offer August First Thursday walkers a high-speed boat ferry from downtown up to St. Johns, has changed the *Zoo*'s lineup since its opening and will showcase a newly hung drawing show during August, its last month. Yes, St. Johns is out of the four-quadrant loop, but if you haven't yet taken in this important moment for the Portland art scene, you owe it to yourself to ride the waves and see what PCAC hath wrought. Highlights: an abstraction show featuring JoAnn Kemmis' twinkly, textured grids, Patrick Puopolo's impossibly nuanced palette knife work, Robert Jones' green and orange impasto. There's also Chandra Bocci's tacky but transcendent *Gummy Big Bang*, Jacinda Russell's room of crumpled newspaper, T.J. Norris' plastic-mounted, strobe-lit photographs, Jack Shinko's skateboard half-pipes, Sarah Wilmer's small-town glossies, Cynthia M. Star's hilariously reverbed 30-foot *Earthworm*, Eric Redetzke's grotesque caricatures of corporate executives, a respectable abstract show from the peer youth, Brendan Glenaghan's studded white surfaces, Midori Hirose's furry pudenda puppets, Molly Roth and Emily Henderson's pillow-padded environment, Kara Doland's knickknack-stuffed parlor, Liz Haley's meditation on *The Invisibility of Pleasure*, PNCA's white plastic maze, and explorations by Chas Bowie, Sarah Braun and Michael Hamilton of the delicious synergy between fine art and wood paneling. The show's most stunning piece, Melody Owen's installation, *Cling*, transfigures hummingbird feeders into sensuous, floating curves that throw fantastical shadows on the walls and ceiling. Indeed, the preponderance of installation work at the *Zoo* is an embarrassment of riches—and an implicit embarrassment to the PAM Biennial, with its head-in-the-sand avoidance of installation. As to the *Zoo*'s own drawbacks, the most consistent criticism leveled at it has been that the caliber of work on display is wildly uneven, that one must wade through crap (that word again!) in search of quality. This is certainly true. But it is equally true of life itself. (Richard Speer) *The Modern Zoo*, 6635 N. Baltimore St., under the St. Johns Bridge. To take the ferry to the Zoo, board the boat at River Place Marina, south of the Hawthorne Bridge, every half-hour between 6 and 9 pm, First Thursday, Aug. 7. The Zoo closes Aug. 31.



VISUAL ARTS

Disappointment should never come as a surprise to anyone. So while traversing the usual thicket of middling gallery show last First Thursday, I shouldn't have felt confused. But I did. To say I just didn't like the works would be to suggest a kind of critical investment that never occurred. I left feeling like I was at the wrong end of a long game of telephone, and once the message arrived I was frustratingly disconnected but still had to tell

the group what I'd heard.

To reconnect, I took my communication breakdown to the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, where Melody Owen's latest exhibit, *Torch Songs*, seemed to be talking just to me—about how it's hard to talk, hard to be heard, hard to understand. The title works, like *Torch Song: You're my Thrill*, are songs translated into Braille on sheets of paper that are concealed behind glass. The minimal aesthetic of textured dots runs systematically across the page, but the viewer can't run her fingers across the text. They are lost, unrequited love songs

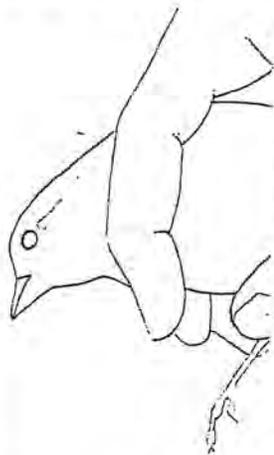
that have meaning only because we're told what they are; we can't hear the song, we can *feel* it.

The *Sonets* further explore obscured communication. Two birds perch on a branch or flutter in the air, their eyes connected by a loop of string. What struck me was the simultaneous playful connection and restrictive limitation implicit in an act of communication: we share a connection with others, a connection from which we can't escape.

In the apparently simple line drawings of the *Empathy Series*, cupped human hands hold small defenseless animals—and a newborn kitten pokes its closed eyes out from gentle fingers. The lines of the work sometimes

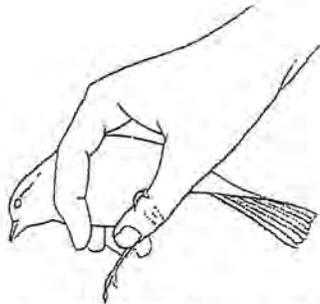
complicate the viewer's ability to see where the animal stops and the human begins, beautifully illustrating the delicate relationship between subject and object.

One wall of the gallery is covered with a myriad of index pages from atlases, separated from their original context and arranged in flowery forms that descend down to the floor. Formally simple and conceptually complex, the piece is a representation of the whole show, a spiraling visual statement about the collapsing beauty of failed, unavoidable communication. RYAN DIRKS



Torch Songs

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 207
SW Pine, through Nov 20



Melody Owen • "Empathy Series - Bird," drawing, pencil on paper
Elizabeth Leach Gallery • Portland, OR

November in Portland

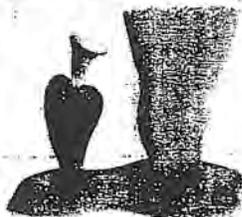
Paintings, Photographs, and Pencil Drawings

November art shows in Portland range from the politically inspired to the intimate and inviting in an array of gallery openings, holiday sales and exhibits at museums.

Elizabeth Leach shows two Portland artists' take on the natural world this month. "Torch Song," a remarkable collection of pencil sketches, is Melody Owen's first show at the gallery. Though Owen has previously worked with media as diverse as dozens of hummingbird feeders and thousands of pennies to create installations on a grander scale, her 9' by 12' drawings retain the lush details of her larger work in a context of utter simplicity. The lovely, spare lines of a bird's tiny foot curving around the hand that holds it (part of the aptly titled 'Empathy Series') transcend the economy of her work.

Stephen Hayes' recent oil paintings capture the gorgeous openness of Sauvie and Oak Islands in a series of landscapes celebrating Oregon's outdoors. Hayes initially creates each painting as a smaller painting on site, later expanding them to larger, more involved works in his studio. The duality of his process lends a sense of richness to the layers of color and and texture he employs.

Pulliam Deffenbaugh offers two very lively and very different November shows: George Johanson's 'Music and Dance: New Works' are timeless, energetic scenes of orchestral musicians, defined by dark



Deborah Horrell • "Exchange"
glass, pate de verre
Elizabeth Leach Gallery • Portland, OR

and sepia brushstrokes in oil. Johanson, who taught painting at PNCA for twenty-five years and has exhibited his work internationally since 1950, brings the detail and feeling of paintings to paper to create lighter, more accessible 'drawings.'



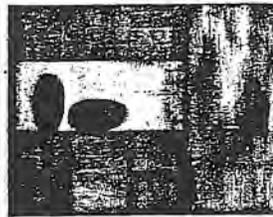
Amy Lunstrum Nelson • "No Wonder She Didn't Get Asked to the Prom," white stone
Contemporary Craft Museum • Portland, OR

The work of Malian ceramicist and storyteller Baba Wague Diakite will also show at Pulliam Deffenbaugh November 12-13. Though he is perhaps best known locally for his public art installation at the Oregon Zoo, Wague's work in clay ranges from functional tableware to the whimsical turtle sculpture 'Koro Kara,' and his recent solo show at the Los Angeles Craft and Folk Art Museum was very well-received.

Froelick Gallery shows a very intriguing pairing of artists, Gwen Davidson and Jeremy Longstreet. Davidson's clean lines and defined curves's distinct gradation of color from whites and neutrals to blacks offer a balance often missing in the chaos of modern life. Inspired by recent political events, she comments, 'Whether a color reads as light or dark depends upon its context; set against a black background, it will look light, and vice versa. When a statement is taken out of its original context, its meaning is easily manipulated to suggest something else. Facts slip and slide, and one is left to search for the truth, for the reason behind the action, for the man behind the image.'

Jeremy Longstreet's new series of detailed and elegant oil paintings are a departure from the minimal acrylic works he has previously shown. He contemporizes the traditional still life aesthetic with unexpected placements, defining the folds and shadows of realistically rendered fabrics with washes of color and light.

Butters and PDX Galleries each present very interesting abstract work this month. Butters' first-ever solo exhibit is a collection of large paintings by Rob Douglas, whose deceptively smooth-surfaced paintings reveal deeper markings and shapes coexisting within denser color fields. Douglas's abstract work is informed by his early childhood in the New Mexico desert and later years in the Midwest; his urban studies seem to provide the final layer in the broad and generous sweep of complexities he exhibits.



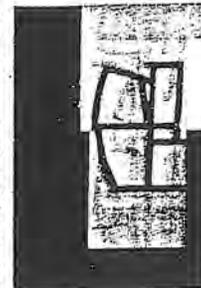
Rob Douglas • "Stillness in View"
acrylic on panel, 36 x 49 inches
Butters Gallery • Portland, OR

Joe Macca's series of abstract panels at PDX have subtle, glossy surfaces integrated with glowing, shifting spots of color. The pieces owe their richness to his technique of glazing each one with a hundred layers of paint. Macca determines his color placement with a contrived system of chance: a number, 1- 6, is assigned to each color, and a roll of the dice dictates both which color is chosen and where it is then placed on the painting.

Don't miss Portland Art Museum's 'Edward Weston: A Photographer's Love of Life,' which closes November 28. The remarkable survey of 80 vintage prints from his teens to his final years balances the vitality of his pioneering 'new objectivity' with his earlier romantic and soft-focused work. The show is supplemented with personal correspondence and memorabilia from the Weston family collection. The museum offers two guided tours this month, free with admission: a Sunday afternoon public tour is Nov. 7, 14, and 21

at 3:00, and a special exhibition tour is on Nov. 10 at 12:15.

Two fine craft sales open this month, just in time for holiday shopping. Oregon College of Art and Craft's 2004 Holiday Sale



Gwen Davidson • "Fourfold"
acrylic, charcoal, paper on panel
30 x 22 inches
Froelick Gallery • Portland, OR

features one-of-a-kind gifts of ceramics, glassware, jewelry, and artwork produced by local and nationally recognized craft artists, as well as Oregon College of Art & Craft students and alumni. The show opens with a reception Sunday, November 7, from 1 to 4 P.M. in Hoffman Gallery.

Contemporary Crafts Museum also hosts "Handmade for the Holidays: My Love is Not Mass-Produced," which includes holiday ornaments, cards, wreaths, and gifts handcrafted by local and regional artists. The opening gala is Friday, November 19 from 7 to 9 P.M., and the sale is open through January 9.

- Elizabeth Leach: 207 SW Pine St, Portland, OR, elizabethleach.com
- Pulliam Deffenbaugh: 522 NW 12th Avenue, Portland, OR, pulliamdeffenbaugh.com
- Froelick Gallery: 817 SW 2nd Ave, Portland, OR, froelickgallery.com
- Butters: 520 NW Davis, Portland, OR, buttersgallery.com
- PDX: 604 NW 12th Avenue, Portland, OR, pdxgallery.com
- Portland Art Museum: 1219 SW Park Ave, Portland, OR, portlandartmuseum.org
- Oregon College of Art and Craft: 8245 SW Barnes Rd, Portland, OR, ocac.edu
- Contemporary Crafts Museum: 3934 SW Corbett, Portland, OR, contemporarycrafts.org

Susan Beal
Susan Beal is a Portland jewelry designer and arts writer: susanstars.com.



Edward Weston • "Pepper" 1929
Portland Art Museum • Portland, OR

Melody Owen is a collector of images, a filter for a whole host of divergent streams that engage the mind. Continuously creating books dense with images and notes that are works of art themselves, she employs the diarist's habit of accumulating the raw materials that serve to feed her art-making process. In the works exhibited here, Owen explores apiarian practices as a metaphor for contemporary urban life and suggests a post-feminist analysis of gender roles. *The Double-Screen Method* is a three-dimensional work built from actual beehives. They are illuminated and invite us to look within. Bending down to peer into one of the hive's entrances, we discover that it is lined with a honeycomb-patterned paper made from an almost art-nouveau-like image of women whose arms interlock. Arresting and mildly disconcerting, the hives suggest a series of reflections on life through the dependent relationship of the queen bee and the drones. Owen goes on, in the installation piece *Crowns*, with its hundreds of whimsical paper crowns blithely surrounding bowls of blood-red liquid, to suggest the life-and-death tension of the selection of the queen bee. The work's chilling subtext alludes to women's psychic and physical vulnerability and the continuing threat of fatal domestic violence in this society.

Hildur Bjarnadóttir, like me, has become a new resident of Oregon within the last year. Transplanted from Iceland via New York, Bjarnadóttir brings a postmodern attitude toward materials and a fresh perspective to the local scene. Using traditional forms of textile art—crocheting, knitting, sewing, and felting—to create her witty surrogate paintings, the artist gently subverts artistic categories and confronts the cultural and gender assumptions that imbue needlework. In *Wool Star*, Bjarnadóttir has used a historic Icelandic sweater pattern with the traditional *lopi* wool to fashion the instantly recognizable pattern of this wall-hung tondo. By employing a culturally identified and prescribed pattern in a new way, the artist raises into high relief the nature of the assumptions that shape and control our lives at every level.

To the youngest artists in the Biennial—those born in the 1970s—the old assumptions about artmaking are of only passing curiosity. The major battles over form and content have long since been waged and settled; the issues of identity, gender, sexuality, and race that so absorbed the artists of the 1980s and 1990s have become a set of givens that seemingly require no further expenditure of effort. This group of emerging artists seems blessedly unencumbered by rhetoric and strident didacticism; they take for granted an independence of spirit and freedom to pursue any artistic direction. As a group, they are open to the discovery and use of any historic trope. They are engaged by beauty in a way that previous generations could not consider.

Like Bjarnadóttir with her use of traditional techniques to create entirely new forms of seeing, Anna Fidler uses the silhouette cutter's tools and techniques to invent wondrous new worlds filled with inventive form and whimsy. The verdant forests of the Oregon coast and the artist's imagining of gardens alive with fantasy's hybrids inspire the *Gardens and Aquariums* series. Intricately complex, hand-cut paper shapes create a densely layered surface in Fidler's jewel-toned collages. In a shallow, frieze-like space, the animated forms of her serpentine vines and fantastic flowers on writhing stems seem to dance to an unheard score out of a Disney film. Amusingly inventive and thoroughly engaging, these works take us a step away from the hard edge of the workaday world, lifting the spirit and freeing the imagination.

The equally fantastic world of superheroes engages John Ryczek's imagination and provides an intriguing subject for the exploration of the tropes of masculinity. Ryczek sees the superhero as the contemporary extension of the warrior-heroes and demigods of classical mythology—in other words, as popular models that embody our culture's assumptions about masculinity. The artist would have us see in the superhero's small head, square shoulders, nipped waist, and bulging thighs the continuation of the Greco-Roman ideal and a revealing symbol for gender in the present. Isolating the highly idealized figures against brightly colored plain or striped backgrounds, Ryczek focuses our

ARTS HONORS

BOOKS, ART, MUSIC, FILM, VIDEO, DVD, CD, AND MORE

Bibliocosmos is one of those rare and wonderful exhibitions that offers more than it promises, and demands repeat viewing. It could also potentially explode the way one thinks about the medium of book-making. Taking the form of a holy sprawl, *Bibliocosmos* spreads its pages through jam-packed vitrines, up the walls of the Cooley Gallery, through DVDs and CDs, in funky packaged mail art, and over a table littered with printed material. Curated by new gallery director Stephanie Snyder from Reed College's extensive collection of artist's books and related printed matter, *Bibliocosmos* shines a light on Reed's rarely seen, impressive holdings.

In the last ten years, Reed art professor Gerri Ondrizek ramped up the university's commitment to book arts. Portland, one of the most literary cities in the country, is an obvious home for such a collection and fan base, and the small, intimate nature of artist's books lend themselves to passionate collection. Ondrizek, Snyder, and the rest of the collection-builders approached the collection with an eye for the historically significant as well as the genre busting, which is evident in the exhibition.

When mentioning important historical book works, Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* frequently springs to our lips (unfortunately, this book is absent from the show, although Ruscha is represented by seven other pieces). The significance of *Every Building* pales, however, to the palm-sized *Die Idee*, 1927, by Belgian artist Frans Masereel. Masereel is credited with creating the first "wordless novel," or giving birth to the contemporary graphic novel. *Die Idee*, whose contents can be seen page-by-page on a DVD flat screen opposite the original manuscript, is a densely symbolic, high Modernist parable executed in blocky, expressionist woodcuts, which were censored in America through the 1930s.

Moving forward in time, the '60s and '70s are broadly represented by heavyweights such as Chuck Close, John Baldessari, Richard Tuttle, Joseph Kosuth, and the aforementioned Ruscha. A spectacular reprint of a Yayoi Kusama poster promoting one of the fascinating Japanese artist's orgies is one of the most electrifying pieces of the exhibition, masquerading as something as innocuous as a Jefferson Starship handbill.

There is no shortage of Portland book activity, as local artists con-

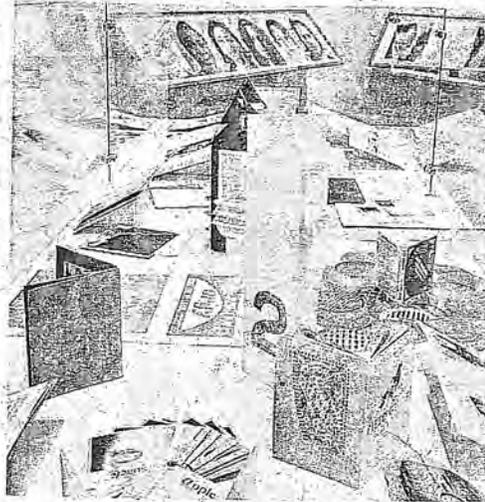


VISUAL

tributed heavily in both traditional and unconventional ways. Melody Owen, whose poetic sensibilities recall a young Ann Hamilton, has one of the few truly sculptural pieces in the show. *A Li Mirau Creba* features an antique Corona typewriter, and a weathered, decaying scroll that curls through the machine and climbs the wall, obsessively reading its endless message: "ticktickticktick." Harrell Fletcher makes an appearance, too, with *Blot Out the Sun*, a filmic adaptation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as enacted by the staff and customers of Jay's Garage in

Southeast Portland.

Impressive additions to *Bibliocosmos* are various editions and illustrations that local artists have created to accompany famous works of poetry. One of Paul Green's figurative drawings accompanies Robert Lowell's translation of *The Abyss* by Baudelaire, and Eric Stotik's mesmerizing ink drawings beautifully compliment John Ashbery's *The Kaiser's Children*.



Bibliocosmos

Reed College's Cooley Gallery,

3203 SE Woodstock, 777-7790, through October 5

being flipped from many of the books, and there is a large reading table, with mass produced books about book art, mail art, and a few large edition pieces by Raymond Pettibon, Harrell Fletcher, and others. This just made me want to scratch the itch even more, but I had to satisfy myself with intense peering. After two hours in the modest-sized Cooley Gallery, I felt like I had just scraped the surface of the exhibition, and will need the full six-week run to absorb all of the splendor and wonder that is *Bibliocosmos*. CHAS BOWIE

THE ORGAN
2002

BABY GOT BACKS!

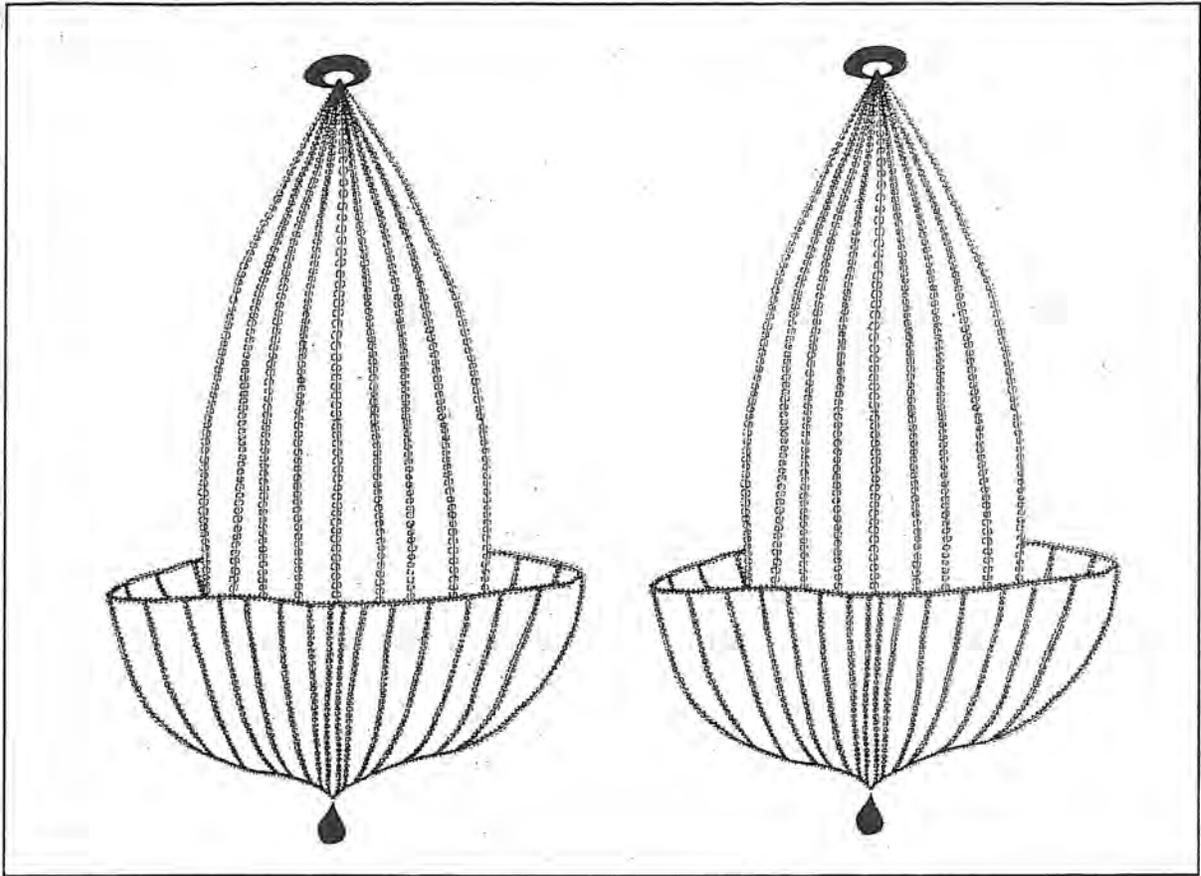
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ing, tupperware party-style. I missed a bunch of stuff
over the weekend because my friend got mauled by a cat
and I had to minister to him. (While hard on him, this
afforded me the happy opportunity to repeatedly use the
terms "mauled," "puncture wound," and "sepsis," as well
as the experience of listening to a woman get fired from
her job over the phone in the Providence emergency
room because she'd missed work twice due to her painful,
tingling hand. I won't go into the Ebonophone white girl
whose uncle had freshly attempted suicide because "he
was in World War II or Vietnam or some shit.") Both of the
events I'd planned to see, at Disjecta and Pacific
Switchboard, were announced on David Abel's intermit-

make do



chandeliers
ink on paper
melody owen 2002

Melody Owen currently resides in Portland, Oregon. In the last two years since she returned from the east, she has been conducting a clinical analysis of the melodramatic. This study is concurrent with one in which she, with purely melodramatic intent, observes and engages the clinical. She will spend the next ten or twenty years documenting her findings and writing up a thesis. The drawings presented here relate obscurely to violence and death. Thank you.

make do

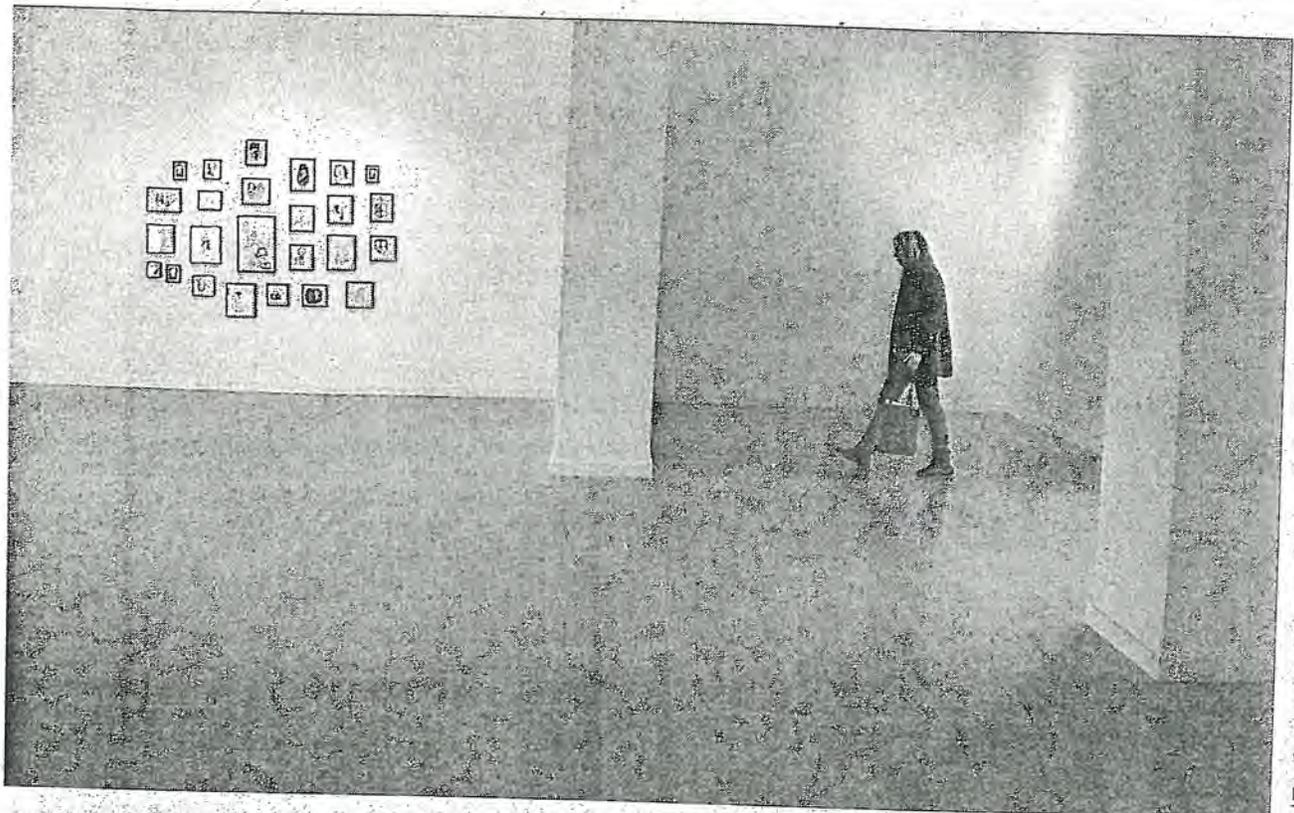
Operated by Brad Adkins, make do is an exhibition space located right here. Its objective is to provide a platform for artists and curators to engage in dialogue with an audience outside of traditional four wall gallery environments. Every other month, one or more artists or curators are invited to utilize make do for a project that may be best served by the print medium.

Those interested in curating or exhibiting inside of make do can send a brief statement of intent to makedoart@yahoo.com

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over the weekend because my friend got mauled by a cat
and I had to minister to him. (While hard on him, this
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whose uncle had freshly attempted suicide because "he
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events I'd planned to see, at Disjecta and Pacific
Switchboard, were announced on David Abel's intermit-

Randy Moe's inkjet prints of pencil portraits. Moe has
drawn scores of fellow prison inmates for barter since
landing in Multnomah County Penitentiary in 1997.
Thirty-seven of them made their way to the gallery,
arrayed in a grid of predictably skewed racial demograph-
ics, each rendered with such painstaking skill and clarity
that I felt, somewhat pornologically, as if I really was look-
ing into each man's face through a very clear plexiglass
window (the young white burnout with long feathered
hair, the black thirty-something with eyes like drowning
sunsets). If you missed them, a couple will reappear in
Eva's December group show. The following night I stole
quickly in and out of the Dianne Kornberg and Sharon

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Former Portlander M.K. Guth, now a New York resident, checks out the energy at The Art Gym, where "Blood and Guts Forever," curated by Brad Adkins, is beguiling viewers.

FAITH CATHCART/
THE OREGONIAN

Show has friendship at heart

The collaborative "Blood and Guts Forever" examines the need for individual connection

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

REVIEW

"Blood and Guts Forever,"
curated by Brad Adkins

Where: The Art Gym at
Marylhurst University, Oregon 43,
one mile south of Lake Oswego

Hours: Noon-4 p.m. Tuesdays-
Sundays

Closes: April 4

one of the most prominent promoters in Portland's community-based, do-it-yourself scene has moved from the land of bathroom installations, community art projects and living shows to a commercial venue. Brad Adkins — one-half of the duo that is called Charm Bracelet — curated a show at one of the area's major academic halls, the Art Gym at Marylhurst University.

The exhibit, "Blood and Guts Forever," features the work of nine artists and collaborators. For Adkins it was a far different artistic experience than he has been used to in his short career as an artist and event organizer. The 29-year-old's previous projects have usually been collaborations with his partner, Christopher Buckingham. As Art Gym curator Terri Hopwood notes in her director's statement, those past efforts also have been sweepingly inclusive of local artists rather than selective.

Projects like "Meeting People," a conceptual work that gathered contributions from more than 100 artists, were really about

for their work, Adkins and Buckingham functioned more like organizers of ideas instead of arbiters of taste. For "Meeting People" the only constraint was space — each piece had to be 4-by-4 inches.

But in "Blood and Guts Forever," Adkins has taken on a solo job of curator and has done so in a conventional way. For the huge, cavernous Art Gym space, he had to pick a theme and choose a select number of artists.

What Adkins has assembled in "Blood and Guts" is an inspiring blend of not always polished yet still energetic and excellent work. And like his past collaborations with Buckingham, including their

While his past projects were sprawling novels, with "Blood and Guts" Adkins has offered, he says, a more concentrated series of "conversations about serious attachments. What it means to have a best friend."

The show reflects the joy and ebullience of friendship through a series of uplifting visual delights. Melody Owen's installation of a machine lobbing bubbles that float downward like heavenly kisses upon a family of little cactus plants is pure bliss. John L. Ryzek's four drawings of "super-friends" are full of Saturday morning cartoon humor and unbridled emotionalism.

But look closely at several of the other works in "Blood and Guts." Ranging from heartfelt elegy to nebulous expressions of ennui, the work Adkins has assembled is a meditation on losing friends and a yearning for intimacy. (This is not surprising for the shy Montana native who says that his teenage years were characterized by alienation. He says only now, in his adult years — and with the recognition he's garnered through Charm Bracelet — has he begun to

lation includes pictures of young girls holding snapshots of people they have lost or simply yearn to be close to. Similarly, Natascha Sofia Snellman presents an enigmatic series of conceptual photographs — aptly titled "every little moment has a meaning all its own" — depicting two older women in cryptic standing poses that suggest intimacy, wry humor and loss all at once. And Kristan Kennedy offers wondrous drawings that dramatize the loss of someone special.

But most moving in this regard is Johnne Eschleman's wall full of energy. Selecting various pieces made during the past nine years, the artist appears to have physically moved a part of his home studio to the gallery. There are dozens of small hand-made objects, drawings, scribbles and paintings. Most notable is a series of mixed-media valentines to friends that reasserts there is no difference between the artistic and the personal realms: One sweet, witty valentine is a letter in the shape of a jet airplane.

In these modest-size tales with gigantic hearts, Adkins and company have woven stories of friend

ARTSRODEO

Saturday night marked the official kick-off the Modern Zoo, a summer-long cluster of exhibitions and happenings organized by the fledgling Portland Center for the Advancement of Culture. Housed in a mind-boggling 120,000 square foot warehouse at the base of the St. Johns Bridge, the Modern Zoo proposition is hugely risky—a gargantuan, untamed industrial space outside the city limits, which might work if the name of your organization is Dia: Beacon, but is hardly a sure thing for a new venue in Portland. In order to fill the village-sized space, PCAC invited dozens of artists to choose raw warehouse space to display their own exhibitions. In July, another round of artists will present work, and at the end of August, the in-kind support dries up and PCAC is homeless again.

The “zoo” moniker certainly seemed fitting for Pete McCracken’s living installation *Main or Artist*. One of the prominent design features of the Modern Zoo is a series of fishbowl-like windowed offices that seem like commentaries on display and voyeurism in and of themselves. Inside McCracken’s locked space, along with a futon, water cooler, and a toilet, viewers could gaze in at the artist David Eckard, who looked only mildly amused by the procession of people who streamed by the windows pointing at him. Signage informed the viewers that Eckard planned to remain in the cube until the last day of August and that “under no circumstances, no matter how much I plea, cry, or attempt to persuade you should you attempt to free me from my imprisonment.” A shockingly high percentage of viewers seemed to believe that Eckard was actually in there for the long haul (God bless ‘em), but one has to assume that the piece is a riff on Chris Burden and Marina Abramovic, in that we’ve traded martyrdom for a wink and the illusion of danger.

In a similar fishbowl office, Andrew Dickson offered people fifteen minutes of fame on the casting couch with *Do You Look Like Someone Famous?*, a gallery of Polaroids showing lookalikes of Mr. Bean, Valerie Bertinelli, and Courtney Love. Throughout the evening Dickson privately interviewed and videotaped the potential stand-ins. It became evident that people look more like celebrities after they’ve told you who the celebrity is.



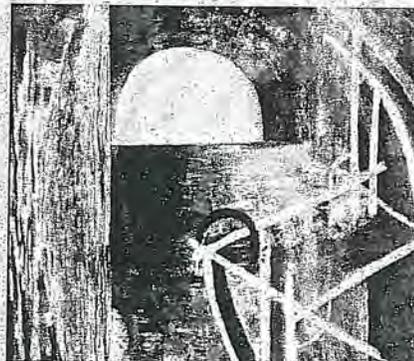
VISUAL REVIEW

Of course, there was art that didn’t involve staring at other human beings, the finest of which was a secluded installation by Melody Owen. Dozens of ruby-red hummingbird feeders hung from the ceiling, dramatically lit by two floor lights. The feeders were hung so that they formed two interlocking circles whose individual elements never touched. Neither exclusively visual nor conceptual, Owen’s piece rather suggested a dozen haikus of loveliness and neediness.

Recent PNCA grad Courtney Price undoubtedly won a host of new fans with *Canned*, a minimal installation that looked like a fallout shelter that had been picked dry of all but a few canned goods. Close inspection revealed eerie and subversive messages that had been deftly inserted into the food labels, so that cans of clam chowder mutely called out “damn, sister” and the crushed tomatoes told me that “the party is over, my friend.”



ART: COURTNEY PRICE



ART: LUCINDA PARKER

The Zoo’s flattest note, however, came from the PCAC’s own *Northwest Abstraction*. For all practical purposes, this was PCAC’s inaugural exhibit, their opportunity to show Portland what they stand for. So in this day and age, with the deep roster of energetic young artists in Portland, to open with a show of (very) traditional abstract paintings is inexcusable. On top of that, there was only one medium-sized canvas by each of the eight artists, several of whom have been showing in Portland for nearly thirty years. Despite the energetic paintings by Lucinda Parker and James Boulton, PCAC desperately needs to differentiate themselves from the staid institutions that have been doing shows of abstract paintings for decades (with many of the same artists). With Boulton as the only possible exception, *Northwest Abstraction* provided no sense of recent trends in abstract painting. We already have enough boring, traditional venues showing us the same, untimely work every month, and if PCAC is going to mean anything to Portland, it’s going to have to show us something a lot

The Modern Zoo

6635 N. Baltimore, 481-7450,
Fri-Sun 12-8 pm, through August 31, \$2-
\$10 donation

newer and a lot fresher than *Northwest Abstraction*. CHAS BOWIE

For more info: www.portlandart.org

MERCURY
2013

VISUAL ARTS THEATER

I've Got an Answer/ I've Got an Anthem

Red76 at Laurelhurst Theater, 2735 E. Burnside, 232-5511, 8 pm, \$6

Does anybody remember that notion of the artist as a lone man (never a woman in this case) of passion and letters, his back turned to bourgeois society, working through his tormented genius to produce objects and images signifying a singular vision? I remember this idea of the artist-as-a-brilliant-island, but only through the popular imagination. By the time I was born, Linda Nochlin had already asked why there had been no great women artists, and a good chunk of the Boys' Club had started scattering pieces of colored felt on museum floors as if to say, "You want a heroic genius, keep looking." So now that it's been established that great artists definitely don't have to be guys, grandiose, or ingenious, the last myth surrounding the Great Modern Artist is being picked away: the Lone Wolf.

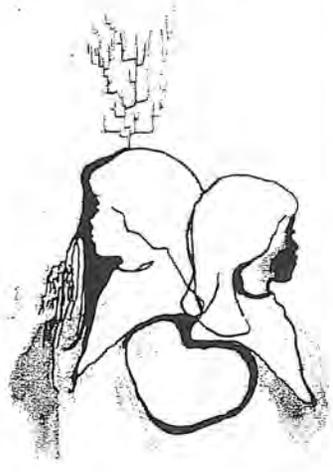
There is a new wave, or at least an unusually large ripple, spreading through the art world in the form of the artist collective. Fresh out of school, usually in their twenties, more and more artists are banding together, picking out cool rock star names, and either making artwork collaboratively, or creating DIY communities and networks that neatly sidestep the traditional gallery-museum trajectory. Portland boasts a slew of art collectives, like Charm Bracelet, Collective Jyrk, Pacific Switchboard, and Red76. On March 13, at the Laurelhurst Theater, Red76 hosts dozens of international art groups at *I've Got an Answer/I've Got an Anthem: The International Arts Group Exposition*. Art gangs from Stockholm, New York, Chicago, London, and Portland will be taking over the theater to screen films, give slide shows, pass out zines, and talk about the benefits of communal creation in general. For more information, check out www.Red76.com. CHAS BOWIE

Blood and Guts Forever Marylhurst Art Gym, 17600 Pacific Hwy, 699-6243, through April 4

This week's Arts Rodeo "Winner of the Week" Awards go to Terri Hopkins of the Art Gym at Marylhurst University, and Brad Adkins of Charm Bracelet for *Blood and Guts Forever*, a group exhibition that



VISUAL REVIEWS



ART: KRISTAN KENNEDY

runs through April 4. In a splendidly unselfish gesture, Hopkins turned over the Art Gym's curator duties to Adkins, an artist and organizer of countless DIY projects, although never of anything as institutional as *Blood and Guts*. The title of the show refers not to chainsaw slasher flicks, but to the promissory idealism of childhood friendships, though the nearly-violent pain that sometimes accompanies intimacy has not been lost on any of the participating artists.

Melody Owen's closet installation, "Almost Everything About You Makes Me Happy," deals most directly with the inevitable pains of love. Thirty or so miniature cacti dot the floor of Owen's closet. When viewers enter the chamber, bubbles begin to float down from above head level, only to reach their untimely end on the pricks of unforgiving cactus thorns. Watching the delicate, perfectly formed bubbles waft unsuspectingly towards their violent end conjures up dozens of possible metaphors. Are the sympathetic viewers the harmless bubbles, and the cacti painful relations? Or is everyone a bubble, and the thorns the sticky world we live in? My favorite part was watching the rare tenacious bubble land on a cactus and hold its own, intact without popping, as if only to prove that it could.

Kristan Kennedy contributes a seductive and somber selection of ink drawings, arranged like snapshots on a wall of family photos. Each teary, dripping drawing profiles youthful silhouettes, either alone or in pairs. Despite their relative closeness to each other, the silhouetted figures never seem to make meaningful connections, either remaining isolated and withdrawn, or separated by a thicket of inky brushstrokes.

Natascha Snellman presents a reworked version of "Who Was I Last Night?," a series of color photos and hand-penciled wall text that features her grandmother and great-aunt dressed in iggy Pop t-shirts and red leather gloves, posing together in front of a blank wall. The blow of the photographs becomes more powerful when you learn that the aunt has Alzheimer's and didn't remember the photo shoot when she saw the resulting prints. The visible bond and companionship of the two sisters combined with loss and memory makes for a tender and haunting double portrait.

Not all the work in *Blood and Guts Forever* is so gloomy—some of it is joyous and exuberant, and bits of it are downright sappy. But like a meaningful friendship, it is ultimately tender, surprising, and sincere. CHAS BOWIE

"The Modern Zoo"

Author: Jon Raymond

06.14.03-08.31.03 Portland Center for the Advancement of Culture, Elsewhere

Curated by the new alternative arts consortium Portland Center for the Advancement of Culture, "The Modern Zoo" is an omnibus show featuring dozens of local artists jostling one another in the rambling, one-hundred-thousand-square-foot precincts of a former office building. Loosely organized, if at all, the show combines the enormity of an international art fair with the free-for-all energy of a kindergarten class, spreading its wares through a warren of boardrooms and executive suites like some young-adult version of show-and-tell. Among the hit-and-miss efforts, certain entries stand out for their seriousness and craft. [Melody Owen's *Cling*, 2003, a collection of hummingbird feeders hung from the ceiling in a double ring formation, casts swirling shadows on the barren walls; Chandra Bocci's *Genesis (Gummy Big Bang)*, 2003, is an explosion of gummy candies arrayed around a bright yellow-and-orange gummy planet; Paul Green's painting *The Ravaging Flower*, 2001, done in the style of high-Renaissance portraiture, shows a melancholy man with a penis growing out of his chest. Coming on the heels of the recent Portland survey "The Best Coast" and alongside the Portland Art Museum's current biennial, "The Modern Zoo" reflects a regional art scene arriving at some kind of critical mass, communally discovering the intoxicating new emotion called ambition.

WILLAMETTE
WEEK
2002

Visual Arts

BY LISA LAMBERT

243-2122 ext. 313



QUEEN BEE

REVIEW

One year ago this week, artist Melody Owen stood smiling amid a swarm of people at the Oregon Biennial's opening party. Her red dress echoed the bowls of red ink she'd placed on a table covered in white paper crowns. People also crowded to peek into bee boxes she'd lined with photos of women—a comment on the lives and public deaths of queen bees.

Owen, who received one of the exhibition's jurors' awards (and much Portland buzz for weeks), was unofficially crowned Queen of the Biennial.

Then the exhibition closed, and the ascended artist dropped from sight. Her only work displayed here during the year was the glimmering and gorgeous *Car Crash Chandelier*, in the PDX Window Project. Had her career suffered the same fate as the queen bees that fascinate her?

"I feel like I've been busy," says the 33-year-old at a table in the Aalto Lounge, where her photo *Apiary* currently hangs. Then, she whips through her activities of the last year. The Pacific Northwest Annual. A group show at Tennessee's Fugitive Art Center. Illustrating a book by Kevin Sampson (out in May). An upcoming solo exhibition in Tennessee. Getting her top-secret *Igloo Project* ready to unleash (she'll only say the project will be on view at PDX Gallery in July before being dispersed throughout the city). Oh, and a day job, accordion lessons and welding classes.

Sadly, her crowns, designed to resemble buildings in New York, did not enjoy such a stellar year. One month after the World Trade Center collapsed, a vandal at the Pacific Northwest Annual tossed the red ink onto the crowns.

What is it about paper crowns and bee boxes that makes Melody Owen's work so haunting?

Before Owen could make repairs, a Bellevue critic praised the piece, calling it, she says, "blood-splattered."

Unbelievably, Owen's first stabs at creative expression were through the compact (and less splattered) medium of writing. She grew uncomfortable with the fact that the reader was left to internally visualize what the words described. Showing people her vision and letting them find their own meanings felt more exact and honest. So the University of Oregon graduate started with collages, then worked toward progressively bigger pieces. "So much art exists, and it's hard to make something new, really new," she says of her drive to combine found images and objects. "I admire people who can make a painting out of nothing. Or musicians, who make music out of the air. I guess you could say what I do is closer to what a filmmaker does."

More like an avant-garde documentary filmmaker, Owen chooses themes that combine science, philosophy and psychiatry, as in the fruit she recently stuffed with inorganic materials. Her idea is that things in nature are perfect both in their forms and in the metaphors we derive from them. Her pieces also use accumulations that look compulsively gathered and maintained (those 1,000 unique, handcrafted crowns).

Unlike other artwork in town, hers is strangely both beckoning and reserved. At the Biennial, people longed to loom over the table of crowns, but also felt nervous about spilling the ink. The chandelier hanging in PDX's window was awe-inspiring until its similarity to a broken windshield became chillingly apparent. Ultimately, Owen's is a teasing and mysterious body of work that keeps you intrigued—even after a year. **W**

Office DEPOT.

From looking at her work, you'd think Owen compulsively collected just about everything. But, because she rarely lives in the same place longer than two years, she limits her personal collections to pulp covers of her favorite literature, foreign-language editions of *Alice in Wonderland*, and Tom Waits records.

More information about the artist's current projects can be found at <http://home.earthlink.net/~thistlepress>.

