

ART

Soundvision, the workspace of Portland gay artist TJ Norris, is one part gallery, one part laboratory.

Incapable of separating science and art, he creates a moving space with an emphasis on the viewer's experience. "I like working in a laboratory of changing aesthetics," he says. "I feel that it's important to present art and composition that is accessible and aesthetically pleasing—a dialogue that is mutually inclusive."

The gallery presents contemporary work in all media with a special focus on 2-D and installations that include sound or relate to technology and/or the sciences. There is also a strong focus on interactive environments.

The gallery's October inaugural exhibit, *Basket: Black Walnut Drawings*, featured intricate geometric prints using homemade black walnut inks by Portlander Seth Nehil, who also performed a rare set of his own electroacoustic sounds from recent recordings. November's show, *disembodied.reconfigured*, is a display of photo work focusing on the 21st century male body by gay artists Bruce Eves, Chris Komater and Ira Tattelman.

"Since they are from three distinct points in North America—San Francisco, Toronto and Washington, D.C.—they form a triangle," the very perceptive Norris notes.

A recent transplant from Boston, he hopes to move his viewers to a more universal level of emotion by incorporating visual art and music. His aspiration is to do what contemporary art is sometimes reluctant to: give the viewer the freedom to experience art in a very personal way.

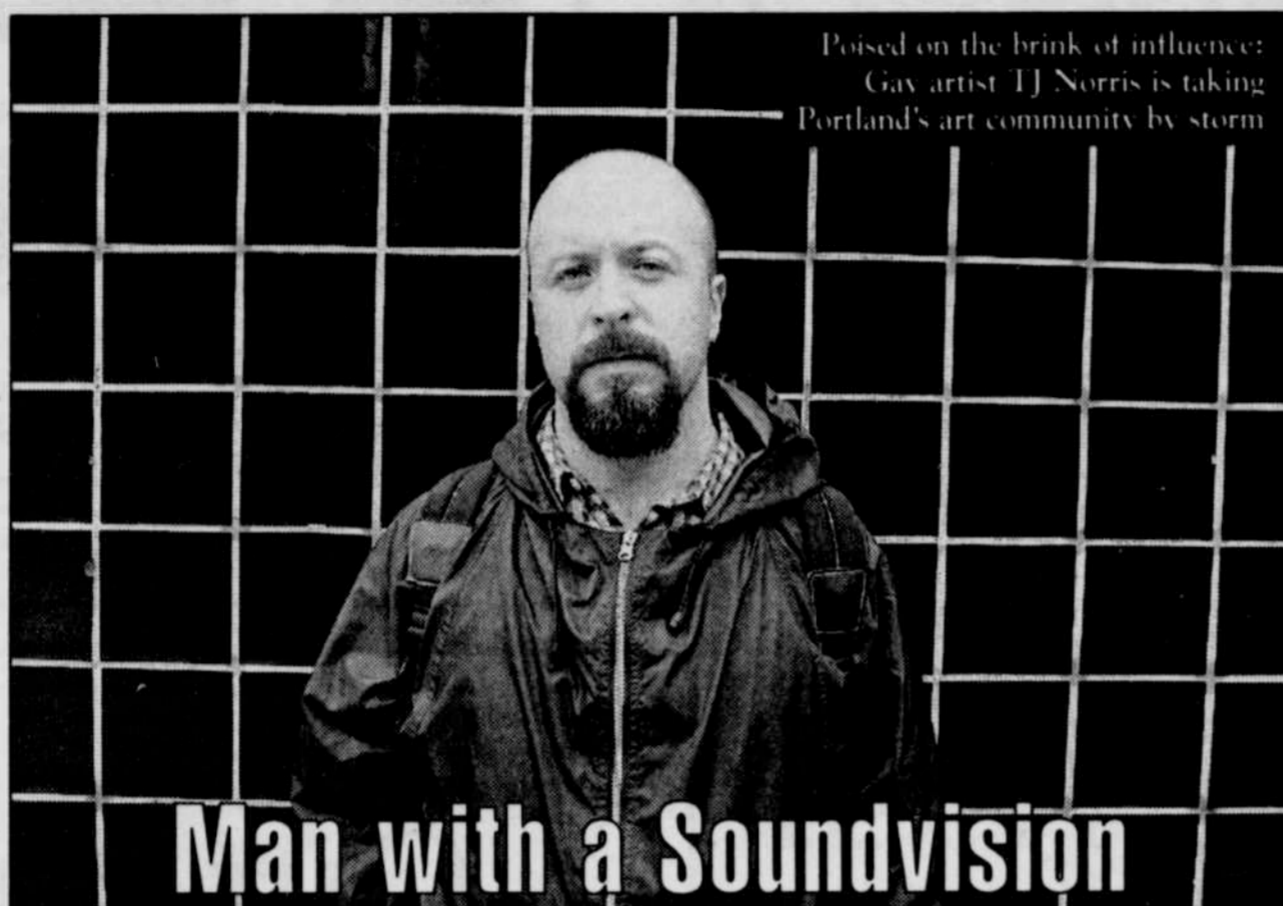
Norris' love of art goes back as far as he can remember. There is nothing particularly surprising to him about his life as an artist; it's just something he has always done. "Making art for me is like breathing," he says.

After years of arts education, he received a bachelor's degree from Massachusetts College of Art's Media and Performing Arts department. He also studied at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design as part of an exchange program.

From there on, the 37-year-old's exhibition record is impressive in its length and diversity. "I never want to limit myself to one medium," he says of his work, which varies from photography to installation. "I like to let my art inform me where it wants to go."

And go it has.

Norris has exhibited his work throughout New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Oregon. During the early '90s he delved into a new career as an independent free-lance curator construct-



TJ Norris' new gallery packs a wallop for your senses

BY JODI DARBY

Poised on the brink of influence: Gay artist TJ Norris is taking Portland's art community by storm

PHOTO BY T. MARINIZ

ing exhibitions for Binghamton University's Arts Museum and Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center, among others.

Norris received a 1991 Massachusetts Arts Lottery grant for an installation presented at Somerville Art Museum titled *Naked Skeleton*. In 1992, *auto-porto-matic*, his first video short, was screened as part of the Downtown Community Television Center's Video/Film Festival in New York City.

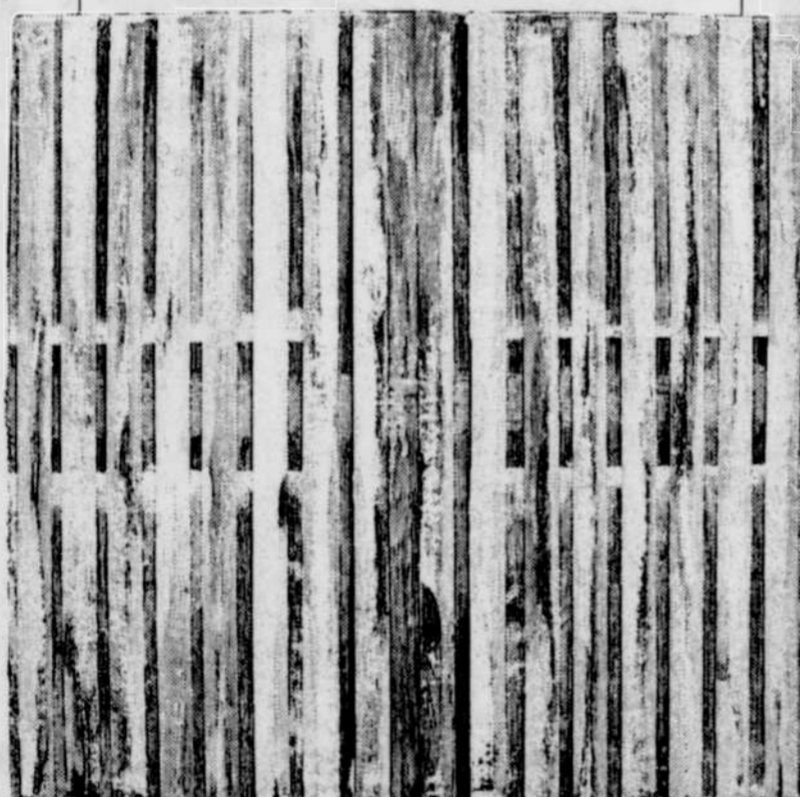
One of Norris' major exhibits, *Homo/Macho-Bear Icons: Art & Artifacts of Queer Masculinity*, deals with the politics of body image.

"The bear culture is something of a freedom movement," he explains. "There has been such an obsession in the gay community with men's bodies—that men have to have the traditional YMCA athletic build or they won't be seen as attractive by anyone. It's like some kind of beauty pageant. The bear culture represents men growing into their bodies, being loved for who they are."

In his photographic series *Urban Ruins*, Norris conveys a similar feeling of art as icon, one that pays homage to beauty and power beyond disenfranchisement. Both represent markers of an urban subculture. Whether pictures of bear men or crumbling foundations, the artist's images succeed in conveying a steadfastness and strength.

Norris' most recent series of paintings, *12SQFT*, is another example of the constant metamorphosis of his talent. The exhibit, on display through Nov. 30 at the Jantzen Beach Barnes & Noble, includes 12 square canvases that are treated in a way that is, in the artist's words, "both loving and distractive."

His intent, he explains, is to turn perfect square canvases into something decisively imperfect. The images' blue, black and white vertical lines evoke a strong yet somewhat unclear feeling.



Part of Norris' 12SQFT at the Jantzen Beach Barnes & Noble

"The more I moved away from definite images, the more subconscious images came," he explains. "They started looking like bars—bar codes—which in turn made me think about the conscious realities of oppression, our consumer culture and how I have made a point not to align myself with it. Instead of plastering the canvas with overt images of Nike ads or supermodels, I chose to make a more subconscious point. I don't believe in...art that [has] simple interpretations. I prefer images that you have to reckon with."

Norris' influences, not surprisingly, are as varied as the art they inspire. He cites the work of Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski and Mark Rothko, who, he says, "have always struck me in their beauty and the emotional responses that their work commands."

Internationally known Ohio art professor Ann Hamilton is also a favorite. "Her work is great in that you never experience her pieces from a voyeuristic place. She makes you feel as if you are as much a part of her installation as anything else."

When not busy curating for Soundvision and earning a living as a human resources assistant at CareOregon, Norris is focusing a good deal of energy on what he considers his "most important work." *Tribryd—Genometrics/Nucleo/Infinitus* will be a three-part interactive, multisensory experience.

Norris has solicited some of his favorite musicians to join the project. "I asked these people to collaborate with me in order to challenge myself," he admits, noting these artists "were so inspirational to me when I was working on my own artwork...who knows what could happen if we made an effort to collaborate?"

He contacted 15 musicians, and nine agreed to work with him. "I was thrilled," he smiles.

Utilizing music and imagery to construct installation environments, Norris plans to present *Tribryd* as a conceptual piece, taking place in three separate locations and featuring the avant-garde music of New York's Joel St Jermain, Beethoven, Northern Ireland's Aranos and others. The first installation, *Genometrics*, deals with the genetic markers of DNA and its minuscule attributes that give humans their unique characteristics and physical identity; it will be unveiled next March in Portland's Gavin Shettler Gallery.

Until then, TJ Norris will continue to live his art. □

SOUNDVISION presents *disembodied.reconfigured* through Nov. 23 at 625 N.W. Everett St., with a reception from 6 to 9 p.m. Nov. 7. TJ Norris' *12SQFT* runs through Nov. 30 at the Jantzen Beach Barnes & Noble, with a reception at 7 p.m. Nov. 8. For more information visit www.tjnorris.net.

JODI DARBY is a Portland graphic designer, freelance writer and radio producer.

KBOO

90.7 FM Portland
92.7 Columbia Gorge
100.7 Willamette Valley



Independent Listener-Sponsored Community Radio



CLARK HOUSE
Sales Associate

YOUR WILLAMETTE VALLEY FAMILY

REAL ESTATE CONNECTION

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS
Confluence Chorus Concert:

Saturday, 12/7 at 8pm • U.U. Congregation of Salem, 5090 Center Street NE
Sunday, 12/8 at 4pm • U.U. Fellowship of Corvallis, 2945 NW Circle Blvd
www.confluencechorus.org for more information

(541) 758-1234 x 211
e-mail: clarkshouses@aol.com

Bryant Realty Inc. GMAC Real Estate
1575 NW 9th Street • Corvallis, OR 97330

The BIGGEST GAY LEAGUE
in Portland bowls at

AMF PRO

300 LANES!

For More Info Call Cathi

Bowlers needed for
Friday night fits league

3031 SE Powell Blvd
Portland OR 97202

503-234-0237
fx 503-234-0239



SYLVIE TESTUD
JULIE-MARIE PARMENTIER
IN A FILM BY JEAN-PIERRE DENIS



**MURDEROUS
MAIDS** REWIND

Clinton Street Theater
2522 SE Clinton • (503) 238-8899

November 1-10 • 7:00, 9:00 Nightly plus (2:00) Sunday