

ART

# Art friendly

Cozy up to Kirk P. Linder's new exhibit

BY GARY MORRIS

We all know that Portland is a queer-friendly city—less known is how queer-arts-friendly it is. And no wonder, considering the still fairly affordable rents, the large number of venues for performance and exhibition, and a definite sense that art is an important part of community and deserves to be embraced and nurtured.

One of the more welcoming spaces in this regard is TJ Norris' Pearl District gallery Soundvision, which in the past year has shown important work by such notable queer artists as Chris Komater, Ira Tattelman, Richard Chartier, Heyd Fontenot, Bruce Eves, Cary (Candyass) Leibowitz and J.S. Adams.

In June, two new queer names are being added to Soundvision's list: Terre Thaemlitz of Japan, exhibiting the video piece *Interstices*, and Kirk P. Linder, a sculptor making his debut in a one-man show.

Linder works with wood assemblages painted in vibrant monochromes and sometimes containing found objects encased in an amber-like resin. Norris describes the Portlander as a "pure artist," working methodically through the process of building, painting and finishing.

"There is a lot of sweat involved. His sense of color is immediate and resonant...a physical vs. a cerebral process."

Linder takes large wood pieces, sculpts them into sections and configures them like pieces of a puzzle in way that strikes the viewer as both playful and provocative.

The works are most reminiscent of the wood assemblages of midcentury artist Louise Nevelson, whose origins arguably go back to her father's work in the timber business of Maine. Linder also takes this kind of approach, utilizing basic materials in dramatic ways.

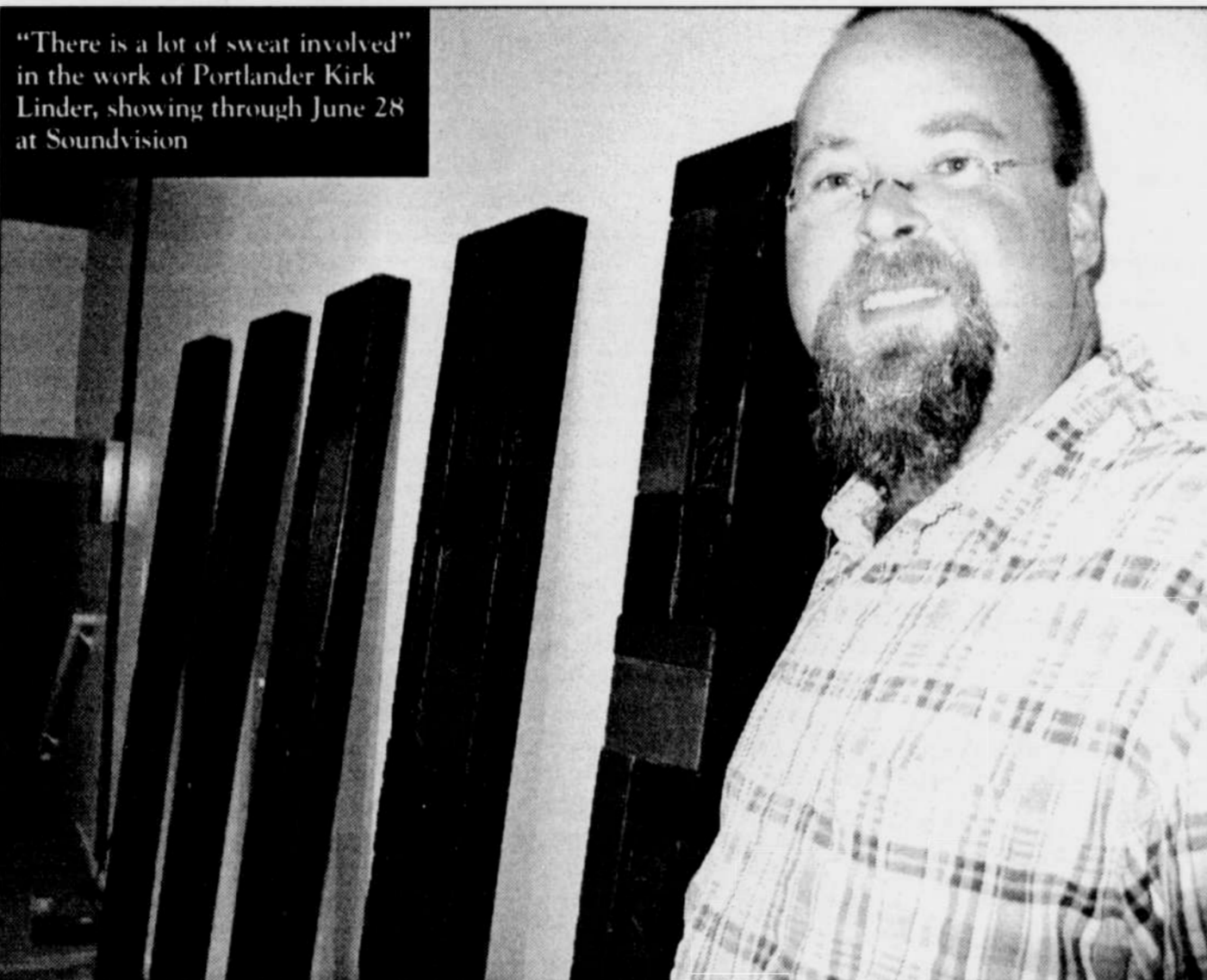
Extrapolation of art from the products of the earth extends to his day job, too, as a garden designer.

"Creating my art and my gardens are separate, but both activities do feed off each other," he notes.

Also like Nevelson, he's a self-described "found object junkie," happily abetted by friends "who are always keeping an eye out for me." These objects can be anything that strikes his, or their, fancy—from screws and bolts

to spark plugs and fish hooks—some of which end up memorialized in a niche of one of his assemblages.

Despite their heavy, fixed quality, Linder's sculptures also have an unexpected sense of surprise—what Norris calls "the use of void/negative space" that "leaves the equation up to chance, in synergy with improv."



"It's all about the process for me," Linder explains. "The work is more about my experience than the final image. My art is my catharsis." He's also involved in a fascinating round-robin project with several friends in which an old door is passed around from artist to artist for further enhancements and transformations.

Linder grew up in upstate New York. "I remember a neighbor kid calling me 'gay boy,'" he says. When he asked his parents what "gay" meant, they said, naturally, "happy."

"I remember a neighbor kid asking me if I was gay," he adds. "I would say, 'a little.' I wasn't sad, I wasn't mad, I wasn't jolly. Just a little happy. The kids all thought that was very funny...it makes me chuckle a bit now, too."

This "not sad, not mad, a little gay" guy came to Portland in the summer of 1997 and found it a simpatico environment, both personally and professionally. "Although I am not into the 'scene,' I think Portland does have a lot to offer artists," he says.

"It's just a matter of going out and getting what you want."

One thing Linder goes out and gets is gay sports. Having done bowling and tennis, he's on the Gay Yellow Pages team of the Rose City Softball Association.

It's "a good place to get good exercise and spend time with other people in the gay com-

munity outside of the bar scene," he says. "One thing that I think is great about the gay softball league is that it encompasses all skill levels, and it is all about having fun."

Linder's art is labor intensive, making the relaxation of sports a must. Still, creating is a fundamental process for him and one that he sees as a kind of communication with the viewer. The idea of a hermetic, untouchable art is not one he shares. He hates the idea of being quiet in a gallery, of being overly respectful toward the art. "I want to take this opportunity to tell any casual observer to please feel

free to touch any of my work...lick it if you want to," he suggests.

Linder also has a friend in his North Portland house/studio who helps him relax and stay in touch with the essentials. "I do have a dog, Francine Fishpaw"—named after Divine's character in the John Waters trash classic *Polyester*. "She helps keep me focused on being human." [F]

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—Kirk P. Linder

KIRK P. LINDER's painted sculpture and trans artist Terre Thaemlitz's *Interstices* are on display through June 28 at Soundvision, 625 N.W. Everett St. #108.

GARY MORRIS is a Portland free-lance writer who also gathers found objects, but then just throws them in a drawer.

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