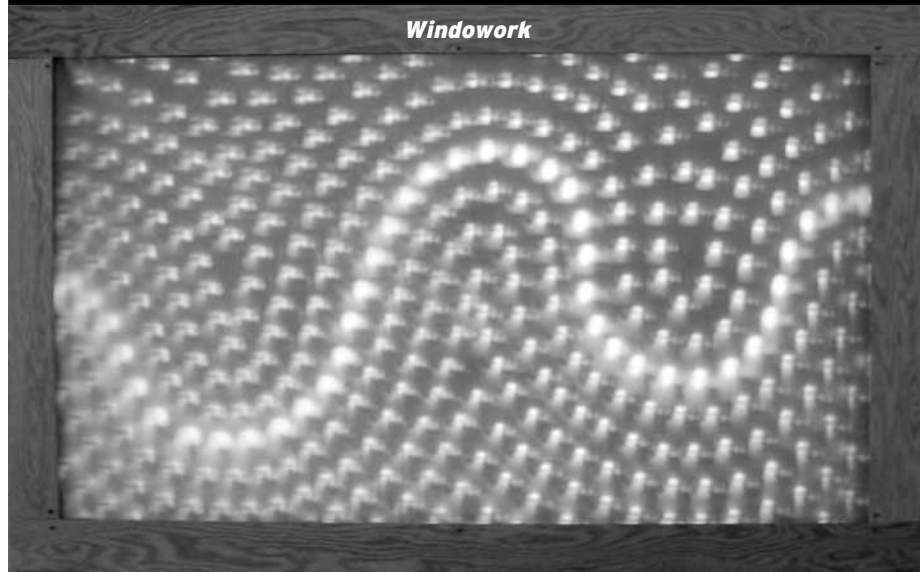




Foreign to the Forest

Michael Boonstra's work connects humans and mediated nature

Walk into the Broadway & Olive corner gallery at DIVA. You'll be met by the forest, not in hackneyed nature photography nor in slightly mystical paintings, but in the ways we most often meet up with our trees: As charcoal, plywood, beautiful pieces of Doug fir, ink, paper. Not that Michael Boonstra, the artist of these delicately tough assemblages, lives as a stranger to arboreal habitats. He hikes with his wife and kids in the mountains and, for two weeks in late 2005, spent some alone time at Caldera, an arts retreat just outside of Sisters, where the trees weren't exactly lush.

"It's surrounded by an immense scarred landscape," he says. "Actually, it looks like the hand of God came down and saved the [Caldera] complex because everything

around it is completely charred." That burned landscape, combined with some other large burns, inspired the pieces for this show.

Boonstra, originally from Michigan, graduated from the UO in 2002 with an MFA. Though he lives in Eugene, his work hasn't popped up much since that time in this town. That's because his MFA show, like those of the other art students during the time of the J-Schnitz remodel, opened in Portland and pretty much stayed there. From that show, Boonstra received commissions and other work in Portland, Bend and other places around the state. He has also kept busy teaching both at the UO and, more recently, at Willamette University in Salem.

His first show in Eugene, all from pieces made within the last year, glows both from its materials and from its rigorous beauty. By restricting himself mostly to materials made from wood, Boonstra limits his palette to white, black, some gray and the golden colors of milled Doug fir and basic plywood. The pieces reach tentatively toward the viewer, appealing in their simplicity yet containing layers of thought and meaning.

Three iterations of artwork, similar in materials and goals but with differing resonance, make up this show. The first is work hung on the wall, like the complex *Erosion I* and *Erosion II*. These two — porcelain tiles framed with Doug fir — mix the natural and the human-mediated by emphasizing growth patterns in trees. The creamy tiles are paint-

ed in dark slip in ways that resemble a print made from a cut log. The individual woody cells — made of clay, not of wood, of course — make visible the price of cutting trees and the beauty in the remaining stumps.

Hanging from the ceiling, *Remnant #11* and *Remnant #2*, like the various *Topography Series* on the wall, reflect a psychological interaction with the forest. Wood-based ink stains white backgrounds covered in Dura-lar film. In *#11*, the smudged ink reflects healthy, full-leaf trees; a separate section below the trees seems to give a view into their roots, reaching down into the frame. In *#2*, the trees are burned, upright stalks that reflect a rigorous beauty but also inch toward the grief inherent to devastated areas. Yet the roots still reach below the trees.

The one site-specific piece (Boonstra's usual kind of work) covers two smaller windows in the room. *Windowwork* uses pieces of Dura-lar and plywood to block off the windows, but a snaking line of holes runs through the outside piece, and the light from the holes reflects in a pattern that curves like a child's drawing of camel humps. But

Boonstra had something different in mind: patterns of perambulation. "The pattern is more of a drawing of what goes on outside that window, with people meandering around and hanging out," he says. The resulting work reminds viewers of the flow of water, a string of pearls, raindrops, birds and many other associations. And standing in front of them for a minute provides a pleasurable link to Boonstra's original design: As people and cars pass by on Olive, the colors change like those in a kaleidoscope.

Boonstra says, "Idealistically, I think about interacting with the landscape by walking through it" as he did during the Caldera residency. "But realistically, how I come across it most often is through manipulated materials." His thoughtful explorations of that experience make this show worth a visit. Robert Adams' paintings and Blue Mitchell's shows, also at DIVA, nicely contrast with Boonstra; I'd look at those two galleries first, then head to Boonstra's work for an emotionally cleansing experience. **EW**

DIVA, at 110 W. Broadway, is open from noon to 6 pm Tues.-Sat. The shows are up through Sept. 1.

Topography Series #2



The Intersection of Art and Life

Citizen-led conversions of intersections into community plazas? Cool! Painting a colorful mural on gray asphalt? Super cool! Stealing ideas from Portland? All the better!

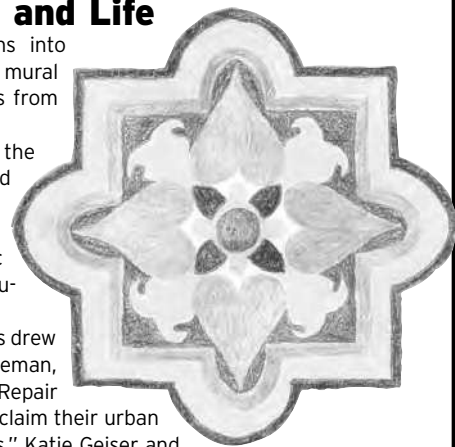
The neighbors in the blocks surrounding the 22nd and Garfield intersection have held yard sales, lobbied for grants and volunteered labor, and, finally, the payoff is near. An ordinary crossroads will soon be a painted public square, used for community gatherings, casual loitering, contemplation and gawking.

Several years ago, the Far West neighbors drew inspiration from a presentation by Mark Lakeman, one of the founders of Portland's City Repair Project, whose mission is to help people "reclaim their urban spaces to create community-oriented places." Katie Geiser and Dirk Beaulieu, co-coordinators of the 22nd and Garfield project, were especially drawn to the Intersection Repairs that CRP assisted with throughout Portland.

Geiser and her small group of collaborators envisioned plans for a pocket park, spiral patio, landscaping, benches and a bulletin board kiosk. In late 2004, thanks to a donation of land from Eugene Zendo, that vision was realized, thus completing Phase One.

Phase Two — a mural painted on the asphalt intersection — has been in the works since fall 2005. A professional artist was hired to make a preliminary design, which was then submitted to the Eugene Traffic Operations for review. Minor suggestions were made by city staff, and the neighbors altered the design. The main concern, said Geiser, was if "a driver sees [the mural] and thinks it's instructing them to do something," like a traffic sign. Ultimately the design was voted on by Far West neighbors and given the go-ahead by the city.

The intersection will be barricaded off on Sunday, Aug. 26, while Far West neighbors, led by local artist Heidi Beierle, chalk out the Oriental-style mural and apply the City-approved latex street paint in broad coats of reds, yellows, oranges and blues. Interested public are invited to attend the block party and, perhaps, dream up ideas of their own. — *Chuck Adams*



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