

Writer Jon Raymond's 20-Year Portrait of the Portland Art Scene

The Community: Writings About Art in and Around Portland 1997-2016



(Storm Tharp)

Updated March 9

Published March 9

Jon Raymond is an art critic the same way a novelist is a critic of humans—a keen and often cold-eyed observer who manages to use his subjects for purposes other than their own.

Raymond is probably best known to Portlanders for his fiction (*The Half-Life*, *Livability*) or the works he's written for the screen (Todd Haynes' *Mildred Pierce*, Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy*). But he has been for 20 years one of Portland's most perspicacious commenters on the arts—whether in *Plazm*, the art and design magazine Raymond has long edited or co-edited, or in national publications like *Artforum*.

The Community: Writings About Art in and Around Portland 1997-2016 (Publication Studio, 180 pages, \$25-\$30), which collects those writings for the first time, shows Raymond as a sort of high Romantic in reverse. Instead of remaking the landscape to suit human emotion, he seems instead to see the marks of Portland in the works artists produce here, to divine the city's essential nature by reading into local luminary Storm Tharp's synthesis of "West Coast funk, Japanese woodblock prints, and Francis Bacon" or Malia Jensen's "taxidermied forms investigating the dark comedy of death and death's display."

The book's recurring obsession is our regional character, Portland's place in the world, the oft-thwarted ambitions of institutions like PICA and Disjecta—and, of course, our uncomfortable post-*Portlandia* transition away from an amorphously obscure city where "people came to disappear," known for "repelling those with too much ambition and half-embracing those who chronically underachieve."

The collection's beating heart is therefore one of its earliest pieces—a 1998 *Plazm* article about photographer Cherie Hiser's work *Re:Visions*, which restaged portraits across 20 years to "portray the grueling process by which adults become different adults, not necessarily better or worse or smarter than before." In Hiser's ex-husband, Raymond describes a "nose softening around the bridge, wide, chiseled jawline shrinking like a day-old balloon," and finds evidence in this of the man's tender commitment to civility.

In *The Community*, Raymond seems to take on much the same project for Portland's arts scene—as the city's own lineaments become more firmly drawn, and it comes to resemble the decisions it has made much the same way a face reflects the life that preceded it. Multiple artists (Jensen, Tharp, Michael Brophy, Miranda July) reappear in the book's pages years apart, and we see in retrospect what has become of them.

The book's official release will be July 9, at Disjecta's Portland Biennial, although it's available for purchase at a pre-publication party this week. The Biennial is perhaps a fitting venue—the book is no less artful a portrait than the works it describes. MATTHEW KORFHAGE.

GO: Jon Raymond will attend a book party for *The Community* at Publication Studio, 717 SW Ankeny St., 360-4702, publicationstudio.biz, on Friday, March 11. 7:30 pm. Free.