

Corvallisites Exhibit at Portland 2016, Featuring Matt Conklin

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Biennial art festivals have conquered the globe over the last few decades, taking a seat at the head of the world art table. It's essentially where everyone wants to be, from established artists to unknowns, to art lovers in general. Portland, being the city that it is, has its own biennial festival, which is traditionally filled to the brim with the best and brightest from the region. This time around, national art legend Michelle Grabner chose two artists from Corvallis while filling just 35 full exhibition spaces available. One was Oregon State University Professor Julie Green, and the other CEI Artworks Director Bruce Burris. The latter is no stranger to working within social contexts, and has chosen to share his space with local outsider artist Matt Conklin.

Containing "bits and pieces" of projects Burris has been working on (from 3D work to drawings, signs, and more), his particular reception will open with Corvallisite Kaitlyn Wittig Menguec performing a variation on a series of Burris' performances called *The Corvallis Tree Being*. The undoubted show-stopper, however, will be Conklin's hand-constructed, richly colored 3D cityscapes. Instantly recognizable, in that most of us have spent time around similar models and objects, there is much to catch the eye, but also a world of wonder beyond.

I was instantly drawn to Conklin's creations. As I see it, the trick to understanding them is to abandon all pretense (easier said than done, of course). What appears on the surface to be colorful models actually contain a tremendous intention of detail that results in the sort of abstraction that makes perfect sense to us at first glance, before a first thought is allowed to bubble up in our minds and pop into existence. Everything is somehow in the right place, the success of which is indicative of Conklin's own lack of pretense. Buildings bespeckled with corporate ads that are both out of place and feel right at home. Spaces

which are both new and recognizable. As an artist myself I can't help but admire the freedom of his craft, which appears to operate under no rules but those he's chosen.

While interviewing Burris, I was made aware of another project of Conklin's, a DIY zine (which will be available for a few bucks a copy) by the name of *Matt Conklin's World of Wonders*, which serves, at the very least, as an important companion to his sculptural efforts. The zine is littered with words and visual art by 13 additional contributors, including the Arts Center's Hester Coucke and OSU's Anna Fidler. After viewing a number of pages, I felt as if I had been transported into a living, breathing dimension of Conklin's art—not unlike what I experienced as a child with Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood of Make-Believe.



Onlookers might nod their heads and say, “Ah!” to discover that Conklin's cityscapes are designed to facilitate model train courses. Though the trains that Conklin often sets up in and around his art will not be a part of his biennial exhibit, their influence on his work is apparent. Conklin possesses a large collection of electric trains and models, which he shares on YouTube (look for railroadguy100). Whether moving through traditional models or those from his artwork, the videos themselves are shot in a very non-traditional manner, elevating them to a form of art in and of themselves. At this point I've seen each one at least three times and will be back for more.

For a deeper look at Conklin's projects, visit <http://outpost1000.weebly.com/matt-conklin.html>.

Though the reception for Burris' collective space is this Saturday, July 9 at the c3:initiative (www.c3initiative.org), the show runs until mid-September. If you find yourself in Portland, be sure to

check it out, as well as the larger salon exhibit at Disjecta (www.disjecta.org for details), which will feature over 100 artists including Burris.

Green's Student Teacher Exhibit

Julie Green's *Student Teacher* exhibit can be found during Portland 2016 at both Disjecta and Umpqua Community College (UCC). Having studied with Green over several terms myself, I can attest to the fact that when she says her teaching philosophy centers around the idea that "the teacher is also the student," it's the real deal.

Born of complete collaboration and the desire to exercise reciprocity, she and several recent Oregon State University graduates—Francisco Morales, Kaitlyn Carr, Abigail Losli, and Claire Harden—will select works for each other to be displayed, traveling and installing together as well. Like most of the biennial exhibits, Green's will run from Saturday, July 9 through Sunday, Sept. 18.

Now That You Want to Go...

If you were curious about the UCC thing, that'd be because I hadn't mentioned yet that Portland 2016 has associated events all over the state. This is a massive happening, with dates, times, and locations all over the place, but your central source should be <http://portlandbiennial.org/>, where you'll find most of what you'll need. The next couple of months provide a lot of opportunities for art surveying, though most of the receptions happen sooner rather than later.

The move from single centers to regional power in the art world is something of great significance—and most important, to us living in Oregon, it gives us power to let shine what's being created by our neighbors.

By Johnny Beaver

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