

"Impossible Instruments" at Fourteen30 and "Tension" at Bullseye Gallery

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Installation of "Impossible

Instruments/Future Flags" at Fourteen30

The group show "Impossible Instruments/Future Flags" at Fourteen30 Contemporary is themed around the relationship between science fiction, futurism and art. Yet there are no spaceships or scary monsters here.

Instead, the 20 works by 10 artists consider how the science fiction of yesteryear correctly predicted today's environmental destruction and wars over natural resources. Accordingly, the collective feel of these pieces can be gloomy. But the show's artists, mostly local, pierce this haze with persuasive ideas and touches of whimsy.

In two works by Kristan Kennedy, a former Oregon Biennial artist who also oversees visual arts programming for the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, chalky gesso plaster and Sumi ink create a gray-white smear to evoke the dinginess of urban decay. In another piece, titled "T.I.S.," Kennedy's gesso is piled so high onto the linen surface that it becomes a kind of hanging sculpture.

Placed nearby "T.I.S.," Alex Felton's sculpture "Tetsuo's Arm" feels like an extension of Kennedy's piece. Made from papier-mâché, it resembles the cast used for a broken limb. Out of the cast emerges black stuffing, as if the arm inside has disintegrated into sooty residue.

Entering the gallery, one finds the only incongruent pieces in "Impossible Instruments/Future Flags," which were made by Nathaniel Price, who also curated the show. Both of Price's works, the mixed-media ["No Country for Old Men."](#) and his oil painting, "Dark Matters," deconstruct traditional cowboy mythology of the American West. Although the latter piece is somewhat forgettable, "No Country," named for Cormac McCarthy's book and the Coen brothers' Oscar-winning film adaptation, features an engrossing tableau of appropriated images of cowboys and soldiers, with a tiny altarlike setting holding a melted wax figure. Yet while war and machismo have underscored today's global and ecological difficulties, neither work seems to fit the broader theme or work with the show's other pieces.

M Blash is better known as a filmmaker/actor than as an artist. [His 2007 film, "Lying," starred Chloe Sevigny](#) and was screened at the Cannes Film Festival. He also acted in Gus Van Sant's film from that same year, ["Paranoid Park."](#) Blash's drawings show a childlike exuberance in imagining a kaleidoscopic jumble.

Arnold Kemp's installation, "A Measurable Portion of Infinity," is simple fun. From a knotted cluster of string on the gallery floor, the string is pulled tight and fastened to the wall, then continues up and through the ceiling. Because the string is made out of hair, the artwork can be taken as commentary on the inevitable stream of mortality -- or, perhaps, just as a playful temptation for your cat.

"Impossible Instruments/Future Flags" offers another glimpse at Portland's robust roster of emerging artists. And in today's struggling economy, such artwork remains a value. These are the talents many collectors can afford today and perhaps not tomorrow.

[Fourteen30 Contemporary](#), 1430 S.E. Third Ave., Closes Jan. 17.

Preserving raw gesture

Jeff Wallin's renderings of the human figure in kiln-formed glass resemble charcoal drawings on paper that have been frozen in ice. Teetering toward abstraction, these atmospheric studies in portraiture bloom with subtly changing shades of brown and gray, which glow through the transparent but rough textured glass.

Rather than fusing glass around an existing drawing, Wallin painted with glass powder onto a sheet of glass, then added additional layers of broken clear and black fritted glass. The works, entitled "Tension" and showing at Bullseye Gallery, were made during a four-week residency at Vrij Glas Studio near Amsterdam, underwritten by a Regional Arts & Culture Council grant.

"Working directly in glass, my goal was to preserve the raw, spontaneous gesture of an early sketch," Wallin explains in his artist's statement. He may have been slightly too successful in that regard; without the glass, the pictures resemble classical drawing like a talented art student might produce in class. But the pieces resonate emotionally, perhaps because Wallin brought his family along for the residency and used them as models. Ultimately, though, it's the beauty of the craggy glass from which the portraits peek out that makes Wallin's artwork come alive.

[Bullseye Gallery](#), 300 N.W. 13th Ave. Closes Jan. 31.

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