

## Mark Zirpel At Bullseye

Bells and whistles make for a brilliantly bizarro installation.

BY RICHARD SPEER



MARK ZIRPEL'S *SIBLING* AT BULLSEYE

It's been six years since Seattle artist Mark Zirpel's brilliantly creepy *Celestial/Terrestrial* at Bullseye, but the artist has clearly been busy concocting new nightmares and comedic riffs for his astonishing new show, *Queries in Glass*. In its breadth, density and sheer invention, this is one of the most breathtaking, head-scratching shows Portland has seen in quite some time, filling (perhaps over-filling) the gallery's cavernous, windowless upstairs exhibition space with a baffling panoply of mixed-media works. With mad-scientist glee, Zirpel cobbles together inscrutable devices out of rusty gears, wires, wood, glass and other diverse materials. In his *Orrery* series, spheres revolve around a metal sun, an astronomical theme repeated in *Orb Machine*, whose optical lenses slowly eclipse one another, hanging from a motor-powered bicycle-wheel device overhead. Nearby, the impish *Flying Cochlea* traverses a wire just

below the ceiling like a robotic tightrope walker. This brand of absurdism manifests as body humor in *Sibling*, in which liquid-filled jugs rise and fall on hydraulic pillars, tubes connecting and channeling fluid between them like a gastric tract. When the liquids reach key levels within the jugs, crude whistles blow off the excess air inside them, filling the gallery with shrill noise.

Among the blown-glass pieces, *Rain Organ* is the most impressive, an intricate set of hanging vitrines and valves. It looks like a chandelier designed by Rube Goldberg. Meanwhile, the show's most bizarre piece (which is saying something) is called *Bird Transducer* and may just be impossible to describe. The basic ingredients are a feather, a fake bird, a glass gramophone horn and an oversized crystal ball straight out of *The Wizard of Oz*. Somehow, vibrations make parts move, a green laser displays waveforms, there are sounds, there are dazzling visions viewed through the crystal ball, and eventually you get the feeling that there must be a higher meaning to all of Zirpel's steampunk-flavored arcanum—or else the scientist must truly be mad, God must be dead and the rest of us must have one foot in the asylum. Notably, amid the *Mad Max* phantasmagoria filling the space's every cranny, the most effective pieces are the simplest. The kilnformed glass panel called *Beach* is a rippling reverie in seafoam green, its immaculate execution and thoughtful shadowplay proving that while bells and whistles make a lot of noise, craft and restraint sing even more poetically.

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**SEE IT:** Mark Zirpel's *Queries in Glass* at Bullseye, 300 NW 13th Ave., 227-0222. Show closes March 26.

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