

"Winter Stream," Epsten Gallery

by Neil Thrun, KC Studio, January 7, 2016

Twenty short films, ranging from documentary and political manifesto to experimental film collage and surrealist stories, await viewers to the Epsten Gallery's *Winter Stream* exhibition. While no single theme unites them, the featured works provide a thorough cross-section of video artwork in the Kansas City region and a glimpse of internationalism.

Brendan Meara's *Dielectric* shows a lightbulb inside a microwave as it glows and eventually explodes, at a slowed down frame rate of 400 frames per second. A longer, 18-minute work by Meara, titled *Continental Bald Eagle Project*, comprises a series of slow panning shots across barren winter landscapes, while a voice reads Jodi Dean's *The Communist Horizon*, an essay about the probability and improbability of the Revolution in contemporary American society.

Other films are also highly ideological, including Israeli artist Yuval Yairi's *Land* and *Icon Factory March*. In *Land*, a performer struggles and wrestles with a metal pole and four metal letters spelling the word "land." They clank into each other as the performer slams the pole around a small dirty alley; he also rolls around the space with the letters, sleeps with them and sets them on fire. The second film utilizes the same pole and metal letters, but this time they are treated like a flag banner or rifle in a series of still shots accompanied by a soundtrack of *The Marine's Hymn*, the anthem of the United States Marine Corps.

In Timothy Amundson's *Bushman (Invasive Japanese Honeysuckle)*, two masked men attired in camouflage attack and rip apart bushes of Japanese honeysuckle. Grunting and yelling, hacking away at the plants with sticks and rocks, the two manage to clear out a small section of the tangled bushes from the forest undergrowth. Despite its ecological agenda of removing an invasive foreign plant species, the film has neither the typical cool, detached feeling of scientific work, nor the calm peacefulness typical of environmentalism. The work has a militant feeling, but also a slapstick comedy aspect, as the chaotic violence is hardly an effective means of uprooting plants.

Documentary works in "Winter Stream" include Blanket Undercover's *Euro-Hypercut* from their *Year of Dream Series*. The two collaborating artists, Megan Mantia and Leone Anne Reeve, cavort around Spain; dressed as American tourists, they take in the sights of the Running of the Bulls and other iconic Spanish cultural landmarks and events.

Jon Scott Anderson's short films document the work of other artists, including Ke-Sook Lee's installation, *Sacred Tree*, and accompanying dance choreography by Jane Gotch. Anderson's *Work* goes inside Miki Baird's studio as she gives insight into her photographic and collage processes.

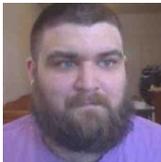
Kati Toivanen's *Transformations-Images in Motion* are short abstract films, created through a collage process of mixing extreme close-ups of objects. Candy-colored substances and unidentifiable objects slowly fade and morph into one another, never giving us a complete view, so we continually wonder exactly what we're looking at.

Barry Anderson's film collage of arctic landscapes provides the image component of a music video for the California band VUM's *We're Going*. Slices of mountains and oceans cross over one another as the ambient pop music drones in an equally glacial manner.

The only true narrative film in the exhibition, Audra Brandt's *The Girl in the Glass Bottle*, tells the story of a scientist who manages to fertilize a human egg inside a glass bottle. After winning awards for his work, the scientist is overcome with guilt about the child's dismal future and tosses the bottle into the ocean. As the bottle travels the world's oceans, the girl grows up and eventually is birthed out of the bottle. Told through video collages of still images, stock and original footage, the film harks to early experimental surrealist films, through its visual style, lack of spoken dialogue and highly symbolic, dream-like imagery. With only a single screen playing the 20 films, there is no need to wait in line to don headphones and no chance to get distracted by a louder or flashier film in the corner of your eye, making *Winter Stream* an accessible video art exhibition. And with a total runtime of less than two hours, only a few of the longer and repetitive works truly test one's patience. While not every film will appeal to every viewer, *Winter Stream* offers something for everyone.

"Winter Stream" continues at the Epsten Gallery, 5500 W. 123rd St., Overland Park, through Jan. 24. Hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday and by appointment. For more information, 913-266-8414 or www.epstengallery.org. The Epsten Gallery is grateful to the Charlotte Street Foundation and to Kansas City Audio-Visual for providing video and audio equipment in support of Winter Stream.

About The Author: Neil Thrun



Neil Thrun is a writer and artist living in Kansas City, Missouri. He is a 2010 graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute and was a resident artist with the Charlotte Street Urban Culture Project in 2011 and 2012. He has written for publications including the Kansas City Star, Huffington Post and other local arts journals.