

# Art Review: New shows add to Lawrenceville's luster as arts spot



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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

APR 28, 2005

12:00 AM

Lawrenceville continues to grow its reputation as one of the city's hot spots for spotting art. The eighth annual Lawrenceville Art All Night was held last weekend at the Heppenstall Blue Building, and attendance, according to event director David Leone, was 7,021, with 878 visual artists participating along with numerous performing artists. At the first All Night, in 1998, there were 101 artworks exhibited and 200 visitors.

Galleries are also on the rise, in number and in quality, and the current exhibitions at Fe and Digging Pitt are of particular interest.

The nine artists of "real or imagined" at Fe (pronounced effie) address "fear" from numerous vantage points -- visceral, psychological, internal, external. Three outstanding installations, two of them site-specific, exemplify the breadth of interpretation an emotion can generate.

Adam Shreckhise's handsomely conceived and crafted wooden "Swinging Floor and Stairway" -- suspended above the gallery floor by steel cables -- confronts at the entry (though one may bypass it). Step onto it to experience a challenge to your coordination that provides the mixed thrill/fear of an amusement park ride.

The floor is made up of a number of trapezoidal and triangular units that rest together like a fine puzzle until someone steps onto them, setting them into a gliding motion. The spiral stairway steps, which climb to the ceiling, also swing freely. Shreckhise built the piece on site over two months.

At the gallery's rear is Athens, Ga., artist John English's "552 Georgians: A Memorial." Rope nooses representing each state resident who was lynched between 1880 and 1930 dangle from the ceiling, casting their shadows over

framed sheets that list the lynching dates, names of the dead and their counties, race, gender and crime.

The first, for example, reads "2/13/1882, unnamed negro, Gwinnett, black, male, theft." Other "crimes" that black men died for included "miscegenation," "political activity" and "colonizing negroes." The majority lynched were black and male, but white Jane Wade died in 1884 for murder, while black Meta Hicks had the unfortunate luck, in 1906, of being the "wife of murderer."

Completing this powerful work are voices reading the names of the dead interspersed with Billie Holiday singing "Strange Fruit." Gallery director Jill Larson points out that the piece represents "imagined fear, for those who lynched people because of their fear of race, but it was real fear for those who were dying or lost loved ones."

Ryan Keene takes full advantage of the low-ceilinged, concrete-floored, stone-walled basement (a Mattress Factory-like space but more intimate) for "I-Function," simultaneously minimalist sleek and viscerally organic.

Eleven finely finished wooden crates, their lids propped against them, are individually illuminated by suspended halogen bulbs and joined low by a network of small aluminum pipes, suggesting the components of a unit, perhaps a body, connected by a circulatory or neural system. The crates are filled with straw that nests speakers -- that emit breathing sounds, heartbeats, whispered and spoken narrative -- or panels that, taken together, read "I wish/I could/remember/more."

The Indiana University of Pennsylvania grad and Indiana resident created the captivating installation in response to his brother's untimely death, but the viewer doesn't have to know of the personal component to sense the loss in the room or to feel empathy with the fading metaphoric being that he moves intimately alongside while exploring the work.

At the opposite extreme size-wise, but having presence nonetheless, are several masterly small paintings by New Yorker Amy Hill. These highly refined portraits of malformed beings who would be at home in a science fiction movie perhaps reference psychological states beneath social veneers.

Wendy Osher, of Pittsburgh, and Larry Jens Anderson, of Atlanta, both

draw upon the anxiety inherent in growing up and finding identity, expressed in fiber and collage respectively.

Rounding out the exhibition are John Benvenuto of Dayton, whose welded steel "Wreckingballs" are sculptural spheres positioned to threaten mayhem; Tessa Windt, newly arrived in the city and debuting at Fe, who's mounded the floor with an ominous black and gray fibrous mass, "from the abandon series, V;" and Philadelphian Richard Metz's altered thrift shop suit coats.

Your pet fear may not be represented here, but there are sufficient to go around.

• *"Real" continues through May 13 at 4102 Butler St. An Evening of Performance Art will be held that Friday the 13th -- doors open at 7 and performance at 8 p.m. Hours are noon to 4 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays. For information, call 412-860-6028.*

## **DIGGING PITT**

A couple of blocks east is Digging Pitt -- only open since February and patterned on the Williamsburg, N.Y., "Pierogi 2000" gallery, which features flat files as well as mounted shows -- where "Vital Signs" comprises eight Pittsburgh artists selected by guest curator Janera Solomon.

The power of photography to record and to interpret is a strong central motif, expressed notably by Ken Neely -- who's also exhibiting in "Pittsburgh NOW" at Silver Eye -- Ed Barbour, Vanessa German, Monique Luck and Earl Greer.

The fresh look of paintings by Leslie Ansley and Kyle Holbrook result in part from their lack of conformity to the mainstream art world conversation.

Sarah E.J. Williams, on the other hand, speaks a language that is highly conceptual but doesn't need a translator for access. Her smart interactive "Points of Interest" presents a city map and colorful map tacks and invites viewers to mark locations of such things as "home," "work," "love," "knowledge" and "friendship" (one visitor placed a tack representing "family" in a cemetery), raising issues of community through a playful activity. Equally commendable was her opening reception work, "Faraji

(Send One Your Love)," that comprised packets of rose petals guests were invited to take and distribute in city locations where they were most needed.

- "Vital Signs" continues through May 13 at 4417 Butler St. Hours are noon to 7 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. For information, call 412-605-0450 or visit [www.diggingpitt.com](http://www.diggingpitt.com).

*First Published April 28, 2005, 12:00am*

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