

visual arts

gallery guide | reviews | events

A 'Serenade' to light, space

By **BRIAN LIBBY**

SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Jacqueline Ehlis' exhibit at the New American Art Union gives added meaning to the notion of art installation. Rather than merely drawing our attention to the artwork, Ehlis uses her pieces to spotlight the architecture of the gallery and how light moves through the space.

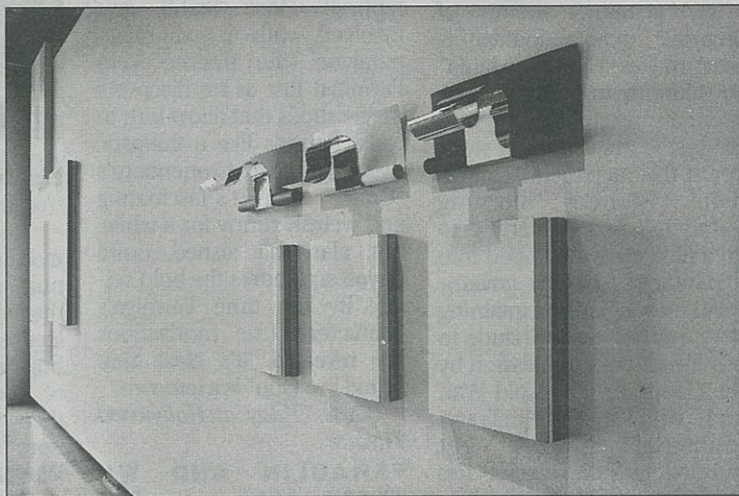
Called "Serenade," the show includes five minimalist works, each comprising numerous identical paintings in varying shades of white. Each painting is paired with different materials: mirrors, sculpted metal, projection. Many of the pieces also protrude from or recede into the wall.

Viewing "Serenade" is a kind of designed experience as much as a collection of paintings. As such, it highlights architect Rick Potesio's modest but exceptional plan for this former industrial space, with its blend of natural wood ceilings, white walls and more natural light than usually exists in galleries.

"Serenade" is the latest in the "Couture" series, for which Art Union owner Ruth Ann Brown has awarded \$8,000 stipends to 10 artists for mounting special exhibitions at the gallery. This is the third Couture show, with Ehlis following exhibits by The Video Gentlemen (Carl Diehl, Jesse England and Mack McFarland) and TJ Norris earlier this spring. Freed from the pressure of making sales, the artists can pursue ideas and projects that might not otherwise be possible. It allowed Ehlis, who was represented previously by the now-defunct Savage Gallery, to make a series of paintings that can be fully appreciated only in this gallery, during this five-week show.

For example, the artist's "Cinema of the Blushing Skin" includes a triptych of paintings with vertically striped patterns of subtly different gesso (a mixture of plaster or chalk and glue) finishes, recalling the work of Agnes Martin. The sides of each painting's frame are painted in a day-glow color (orange, purple) that reflects light powerfully beside the huge storefront floor-to-ceiling glass of the gallery's entry. One of the paintings is also mounted above the perimeter of the drywall so that it's level with the base of a ceiling beam. Onto the trio of paintings, Ehlis projects faintly from a ceiling-mounted projector a series of still photographs.

Another piece, "After Hours Red (The Red Corner)" references the slatted wood mezzanine overlooking the two-story main gallery space. But Ehlis also takes as inspiration the "red corner" common in orthodox Russian faith, in which practitioners living far from a church would reserve a special corner of their homes



"Flush, Poise, and Immerse"

One of the pieces by Jacqueline Ehlis in her show "Serenade"

(where the morning sun's rays first landed) as a family altar.

This influence seems fitting, because despite the minimalist style of the paintings, there is an unmistakably spiritual, serene feeling one gets from this exhibit. It's a show of paintings, and excellent ones at that, but it feels more like an exploration of light and its properties, with the works acting figuratively, and in one case literally, as mirrors.

"By taking on the idea of what makes a painting work in space," Ehlis writes in her artist statement, "I've focused in on ... celebrating

one's method of seeing, thereby changing the world." That's a lot to ask from a room full of white paintings, but it's true that seeing "Serenade," particularly in the late afternoon on a sunny day when the light is at its most dramatic, can be truly transporting.

New American Art Union, 922 S.E. Ankeny St.; noon-6 p.m. Thursday-Sunday; through Aug. 10

High Tech-Low Tech

For the exhibit "High Tech-Low Tech" at its Hoffman Gallery, the Oregon College of Art and Craft invited members of the Northwest Designer Craftsmen organization to create pairs of artworks: one piece with high-tech materials or methods, and the second using more traditional means. The exhibit ties in with the college's recent rebranding effort (crafted by Portland's Ziba Design) as a school occupying the intersection between classic craft methods and materials and contemporary ones.

Instead of contrasting high- and low-tech, some artists combined them. Patricia Resseguie's "Passport" is a cotton wrap made using thermal polyester that's quilted to an aluminum screen. It's basically a metal blanket like those occasionally seen in science fiction or in dentists' offices. Carol Milne pairs the disappearing art of wax casting with glass to make fascinatingly tactile sculptures of woven glass.

Despite not having much of a curatorial statement, the show brings a variety of materials and methods, some of them employed for the first time and others handed down over generations.

Oregon College of Art and Craft, Hoffman Gallery, 8245 S.W. Barnes Road; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily through Aug. 24

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