

'Shine a Light' heads into belly of the beast

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

On Friday, the pristine galleries of the Portland Art Museum will turn into laboratories run by experimental art scientists.

Students from Portland State University's Art and Social Practice department will present more than 20 events, performances and related programs that will likely push art beyond the boundaries of convention.

In its second year, the event, called "Shine a Light," promises an evening that ranges from the profound to the ridiculous, with sights and atmosphere you don't usually see in a museum, including break dancing, nude wrestling and beer.

No matter where you stand on the social practice art movement, you can't deny the positive impact the evening is meant to nurture.

The museum's median member

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Shine a Light

Where: Portland Art Museum, 1219 S.W. Park Ave.

When: Friday, 6 p.m.-midnight

Admission: \$12 general; free for members

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'Light': Social practice attempts to demystify art

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age is 57, and attracting younger members is crucial as the museum tries to expand its brand and patron base beyond the well-to-do in the West Hills.

That's why the museum's education director, Tina Olsen, partnered with PSU's social practice program last year to create the event.

If there is an art movement that speaks directly to those nurtured by the era of social networking and new media, it's social practice. Broadly speaking, social practice rejects the values and practices of the traditional art historical canon, where artists and art objects are measured by critical appraisal, pedigree and even financial value.

On the other hand, social practice, which has its roots in both the Dada and Fluxus movements, is about using art in a way that creates more intimate relationships between art and viewer. It also questions the hegemony of museums over artists and other institutions.

In many ways, social practice is about demystifying art, pulling back the curtains that separate art and viewer, museum and visitor, and so on.

Portland has been a hotbed of the social practice movement for some time.

That's why Portland artist Harrell Fletcher helped create the social practice program at PSU a few years ago, and why one of the department's chief social practice practitioners, professor Jen Delos Reyes, created and directed a four-day gathering of social practice artists from across the country earlier this year.

That event, "Open Engagement," offered all manner of social practice artworks, from art-based cook-offs to runathons that forced participants to come to terms with their fear.

"Shine" might be considered a distillation of that four-day extravaganza but with different offerings.

Ariana Jacob's work, for instance, will ask viewers to

pick an artwork at the museum with which they want to have a more "intimate" relationship.

Delos Reyes has created an audio tour that pairs selected works from the museum's collection with particular pieces of music meant to enhance the meaning of the artwork. Two male artists will pay homage to the museum's Greek and Roman sculpture by wrestling in the nude. And Josh Mong will relight the museum's silver galleries with changing-colored lights that will allow visitors to see the collection in a different way, literally.

What's it all mean? You'll have to go with an open mind to find out, of course.

But a few things may help while experiencing the evening.

The goofy-seeming antics of these artists may give the impression they are not serious, when they are indeed tremendously idealistic. They also are a bit contradictory, too. The movement questions the very standing of establishment institutions like museums, for example, but have become, in recent years, willing members and partners to the establishment. They've been accepted by the art world hierarchy.

That should not be surprising. All revolutions, including artistic ones, are about power — questioning it, getting it and eventually embracing it.

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