

## Jacob Hartman, Lizzie Fitch and others visual artists at the Time-Based Art Festival

By David Row

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When New York-based video and installation artist Jacob Hartman was invited to be part of the **Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's Time-Based Art Festival** this year, he says he accepted because of the distinctive approach the event allows.

"PICA really develops the work with the artists," said Hartman during a recent interview while he prepared for "\_\_\_\_\_Head," his combination sculpture-video installation for the festival. "Rather than just choosing a work out of your studio, they have made a point to change how that typical interaction happens. They have given me and the other artists the freedom and time to develop things. There was a lot to be left decided (about the piece) when they committed to it. As an artist working outside the studio, it is important to feel like that's OK."



Jacob Hartman at TBA

Since August, Hartman and fellow artist Lizzie Fitch have participated in a PICA staple: the artist-in-residence program. For the past month, they've been in Portland making work that will premiere during the festival. The work isn't the only art that will be seen for the first time during the festival: PICA also commissioned new work specifically for the festival by Justin Gorman, Jeffrey Mitchell and Corey Lunn.

These original works say a great deal about the festival's visual art component directed by PICA's visual art program director, Kristan Kennedy. Although TBA is focused overwhelmingly on the performing arts, each year, the visual art offerings have increased or have become particularly distinctive. A stunning light sculpture by Hap Tivey in 2006, for instance, comes immediately to mind, as does last year's Larry Bamburg's spinning sculpture of paper, string and wire.

The visual arts will likely find a larger audience this year because instead of separate locations their creations are exhibiting at The Works, TBA's combination restaurant/bar, performance and late-night hangout space. This year's site is Leftbank, a spacious old multistory warehouse across the street from the Rose Garden arena on North Broadway, renovated rapidly and ingeniously by **BOORA Architects**. Here the artwork will be an un-ignorable part of the action.

Both Hartman and Fitch are multifaceted artists interested in breaking down barriers and, at times, comfort zones. A case in point is Hartman's video sculpture, "\_\_\_\_\_Head." Resembling a giant tarantula made out of crudely enwrapped wire, cables and televisions with occasional blotches of multicolored paint, it hangs from the ceiling as if ready to ensnare us. The piece's video screens also display Hartman's droll found-footage collages and dabs at animation. It's unclear just how to pronounce the title, and that's symbolic of the viewing experience as well.

"I wanted to make something someone would have to consider how they'd engage with the object," he says of the piece. "How do you say this thing? How do you engage the work? Everybody wants to be surprised a little bit, but the way you approach a work is comfortable. I'm interested in changing that a little bit, making it awkward." Also on view is a photo series called "Piece Be With You" that documents Hartman's interactive performance with community members over his six-week artist-in-residence period here. "It was really to go into people's houses, meet with them, remove an object from the house and return it with modifications," he explains. Hartman built a decorative stand for one person's exercise ball. Another's computer monitor received a dust cover made -- from plastic resin -- to look as if paint had oozed down the screen.

"I feel like it was a great exchange between me and complete strangers," Hartman says. "There had to be a certain amount of trust involved."

That trust may also include reclining on what appear to be sofas made of skin.

For her exhibit "Big Skin" at The Works, the Philadelphia-based Fitch has made several abstract furniture pieces draped with "human skin clone blankets," as the artist calls them. Made from plastic, wood and other materials, these tapestries of human parts add a dreamlike ambience to Leftbank's already atmospheric decaying concrete interiors while exploring the relationship between identity, technology and reality. Maybe, Fitch seems to suggest, our bodies are just one of many identities we take on, along with our virtual avatars or even the cute toasters we buy at Target.

And then there's the Experimental People Band, Fitch and a cast of performers who will at times forgo The Works' stage to interact with viewers. Fitch was more reticent to divulge exactly what to expect in this part of the show. However, she explained, "I've been able to kind of use the setup of TBA, and this space, as props. Even though it's a sculptural installation, I kind of always want to reference the performative aspect of sculpture. It's definitely not a white-box situation. But for me, that's one of the most exciting things to me about it."

*Hartman and Fitch's works, along with those by other visual artists, are on view at Leftbank, 240 N. Broadway. Hours: noon-6 p.m. daily until Sept. 14; noon-6 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday from Sept. 15-Oct. 4.*

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