

Pittsburgh International Festival of Firsts

Premieres you won't see anywhere else!

Gravity's Rainbows

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Against the far wall of the Strip District's beautifully decrepit Pipe Building, Ganjin stands, as it seems he always has. Twenty-two feet tall, the iconic photo-sculpture might otherwise be the focus of all eyes upon entering the building. But no artistic preciousness is afforded to this work: A ventilation shaft bursts through the blind monk's head, like an industrial flower, creeping through the pavement after years of man's neglect. On a ledge near his knees, an oil can - the type that saved the Tin Man - sits rusting, just as it was when the Starns first entered this building; near it, a broken electrical outlet dangles, casting its shadow onto the monk's form.

Mike and Doug Starn - the New York City artists who created Gravity of Light - could've worked around the building's post-industrial facets, but chose specifically, they point out, to allow those "faults" to become a part of the artwork. Just as Ganjin's head is exploded, other ten-foot-tall renderings are split in half, cut unceremoniously to make way for the irregularities in the wall.

And at the center of it all - yet also surrounding it - is that light, the unique, primal, natural light of their self-designed carbon-arc lamp, filling the solar system of the Starn's work with a light that not only creates its singularity, but, in fact, is the art itself. With not a photo, not a single work of discernable art on the walls, that light in this room would still arguably be one of the most beautiful, insightful shows in Pittsburgh for years. The Pipe Building, transformed by the lamp, becomes an ancient relic, a smoldering holdover from some pre-apocalyptic world culture, illuminated for the first time in millennia by those beams.

"The infinite is in everything," the Starns say, as



uniform in their message as they are in their identical-twin appearance. That "infinite," they argue, is as much in the dusty and peeling interior of this turn-of-the-last-century warehouse as it is in the white-walled Stockholm gallery where this compendium of their work first appeared. (Its showing here, as part of the Pittsburgh International Festival of Firsts, is its first-ever North American exhibition.)

More so, I would argue. Enter Gravity of Light and first, on your right, you'll see a shadowed tree, its branches seeming to curve longingly, sadly, towards the distant light of the burning carbon rods, a waning Autumnal spirit. Wade through the tall cast shadows of your fellow visitors, and eventually you'll arrive at its brother, an almost identical work which, by virtue of its position near the lamp, appears to glow with Spring's reckless hope.

Gravity of Light's magic is so intertwined with its various facets - the natural power of the light, the murky dark of the building, its stunning images of moths, decaying leaves, and other photosensitive life forms - it's hard to imagine that it could ever be shown elsewhere. To say that this is the most "important" exhibit in Pittsburgh outside the Carnegie International is meaningless in the face of such unpretentious beauty. It seems more valuable to call Gravity of Light possibly the most beautifully composed ephemeral artwork on display at this moment, anywhere - one made more beautiful by the fact that it remains so subtly and quietly, foregoing fanfare for mere enlightenment.