

# The Oregonian

## Time-Based Arts Festival Review: "Illegal Art"

by Lee Williams

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Though it's not a large exhibit, the broad range of copyright and fair use issues explored by the Illegal Art show, currently installed at Pacific Northwest College of Art's Feldman Gallery, would likely fill a legal pad or two.

The traveling show, which features works from artists ranging from Talking Heads' **David Byrne** to Portland-based filmmaker **Todd Haynes**, is presented by PICA, PNCA and The Feldman Gallery and is currently running as part of the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's TBA Festival. But even after TBA, Illegal Art will remain in the space through Oct. 21.

It's a fascinating survey of the struggles, past and on-going, of filmmaker, bands, photographers and illustrators who have dared to interpret and re-present images, logos, and cartoon characters offered to the public by corporations and even other artists.

Disney's Mickey Mouse, Mattel's Barbie, seem to have proven particularly tough popular icons for artists to adapt. But, and what proves a testament the depth of this exhibit, even small battles, like that between the makers of Garbage Pail Kids cards (loved by kids, but a cringe-inducing collectibles for parents, back in the '80s) and the folks behind the goody-two shoe'd Cabbage Patch dolls are noted here.

But copyright fights have not just been between edgy artists and corporate suits. **Joy Garnett's** "Molotov," a painting based on a photojournalist's previously published image, raises the hot issue of fair-use and visual sampling. While a framed cover of **Negativland's** notorious 1991 single "U2" denotes the San Francisco collage-sound band's fight with U2's label, Island Records, and foreshadows the industry's sampling disputes, right up to current "mashups," used by daring DJ's like **Danger Mouse**.

There are no easy answers here. But many provocative questions -- what is fair use? What is in the public domain? -- are raised. Often the questions are presented in humorous terms, such as Byrne's mirage-like photos of corporate signs at a North Carolina industrial park, and with sharp, heartfelt clarity (**Packard Jennings'** sculpted proposals to Pez for candy dispensers based on deceased rap artists).

Though the show contains material for mature eyes, on a recent weekend afternoon a half dozen teens were taking in the show with an adult. And the hum of parent-kid discussions could be heard.

With new cultural icons popping up every day, this is a crucial, if brief, examination of a chapter of art history still being written. It's worth taking in, and worth talking about.

*Illegal Art: Freedom of Expression in the Corporate Age can be seen from 9 a.m.- 9 p.m. daily at the Feldman Gallery, 1241 N.W Johnson St. Mature audiences. Free.*