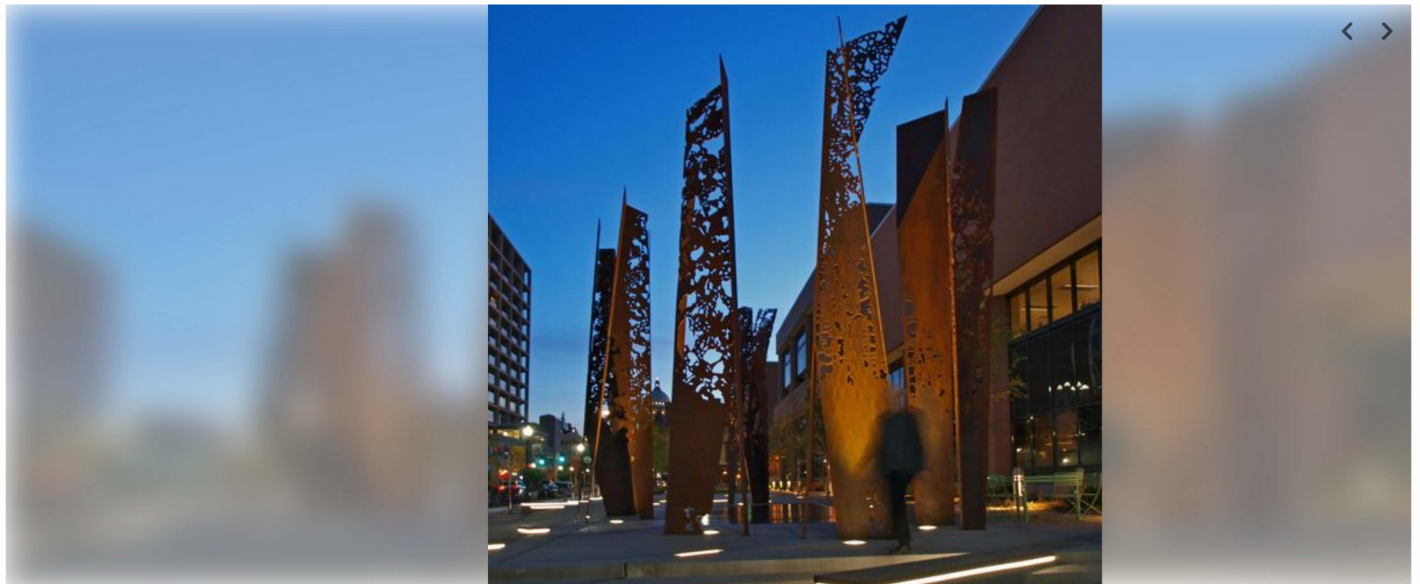


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The intimacy of slow looking

Driek Zirinsky For the Idaho Press
Sep 24, 2023



"Cottonwoods," a project that is a collaboration; the artists are Dwaine Carver and Zach Hill.
Zach Hill

The exhibit, "Porous Images" by Dwaine Carver and Alex Carver, is open now until Thursday, Oct. 26 in the Blue Galleries at the Center for the Visual Arts, Boise State University, directed by Kirsten Furlong. It is a challenging exhibit, both to take in and to write about, but it offers the reward of a beautiful, immersive, and intimate experience.

The word exhibit is probably the wrong term for me to use here. It is more an installation, an experience of slow looking inside the dimly lit chamber of a camera obscura, almost as if you were underwater slowly getting your bearings and trying to make sense of what you are seeing and experiencing. It also includes drawings and paintings by the two artists which require a close-up and contemplative viewing.

The curator, Rachel Reichert, had the idea to bring these two exceptional Boise-based artists together in a rare collaboration. And although they are father and son, it is not about their familial relationship. Instead, it explores overlapping ideas guiding their very different art practices: Dwaine Carver's as an architect and public artist, Alex Carver's as a painter and video artist. Dwaine Carver explained that although they have not collaborated before as artists, that they have "... collaborated all their lives." Rachel Reichert commented that they share commitment to their disciplines, share ideas about making art, and both create abstractions of something familiar. The two artists describe this occasion of working together "...as a gift!"

You will have seen the collaboration by Dwaine Carver and Zach Hill, "Cottonwoods," outside Boise City Hall. He is also the architect behind the stunning building formerly known as the j.crist gallery. Now a professor of Architecture at the University of Idaho/Boise, he formerly taught at Boise State. In this exhibit he shows another side of his art making with a rare showing of his exquisite, delicate drawings.

Alex Carver is a painter and film maker with an impressive resume for any artist, but especially for one as young as he is. Some highlights include a solo exhibition in 2023, "A Desired Mesh," at the Museum der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland. Carver's collaborative feature film with Daniel Schmidt,

"The Unity of All Things," was presented at the 2013 Locarno International Film Festival, Switzerland. Other film works have been shown in international venues and festivals such as Tate Modern (London, 2014), and the Vancouver International Film Festival (2013).

Porous is an operative word for both artists. Porous, fluid, pervious, transparent, indeterminate: these are words to describe how they view their materials and their processes. Dwaine Carver explains that they both are interested in the "...structural attributes of space and vision and representation." Alex Carver understands the canvas as "... a kind of membrane that can receive impressions from the back and the front ... a kind of biological screen, like a skin" He describes his paintings as dense, layered works which don't reveal themselves quickly. To both, the meaning in a work lies most fully in how it's constructed. The camera obscura, Dwaine Carver explains, is "...a shorthand" for their artistic ideas, it's a "... play between one's encounter with the image and space and structure."

The gallery space has been altered into two chambers each with a camera obscura projecting inverted images of traffic on Capitol Boulevard and pedestrians on the campus. The Carvers tell me they have installed very leaky cameras which bleed extra light. The "camera obscura," with a long history in art, is a dark space, a room in this case, with a lens at one side. The light outside coming through the lens projects the images onto the screen. The light is very low, and you will have to stand inside the entrance for several minutes to let your eyes adjust. You will be slowed down in every way, which, if there is a point — and the Carvers say there is not one — would be at least one point to grasp. Then you will see a sheer hanging scrim, which is just at the focal length of the camera, revealing what's going on outside, but upside down. The light not caught on the screen bleeds along the walls of the gallery, increasingly distorted as it moves into the room, mysterious, indecipherable.

This is not the kind of imagery we are used to seeing, the highly resolved, very defined images found on our screens and in advertising. The imagery from the camera obscura is ephemeral, not recorded, floating by at the speed of the walkers and the cars, the velocity of the wind in the trees. Sounds from outside penetrate the gallery: voices, a car backfiring. It's not a soundtrack but the aural backdrop of a reverie. The artists call the speed of our contemporary culture our "collective cultural metabolism," the quick pace of daily life, and the expectation to quickly grasp visual meaning and move on. They are deliberately causing visitors to down-shift, slow-down, look differently. Dwaine and Alex Carver have collaborated on one other work, a low standing metal sculpture, "Topology Double 2023," located in the second chamber. Made of aluminum, it is porous, cut with images taken from the work of both artists in the exhibit.

The wall-mounted artwork does have some extra lighting, but I admit my old eyes wanted more light to see them up close. (I may sneak a small penlight in the next time I go to see Dwaine Carver's fascinating, compelling drawings.) In the center of each is an "automatic" drawing — an idea coming from the art movement Surrealism — a drawing created as if without a maker's hand. In one, the artist has blown bubbles tinted with ink onto the paper, in another wind has made random marks. For "Rain Drawing 2023," he placed charcoal dust on the paper and put it out in the rain for a few minutes. He describes this process as "... putting a screen between me and the world and getting the world to make marks for me." In each case he has isolated a quadrant of interest and has drawn architect's projections from them, entirely imagined structures and drawn from four perspectives, often including a bird's eye and a worm's eye view.

All of Alex Carver's work is new to me. For "Porous Images" he has made four paintings illuminating the idea of the canvas as a porous, skin-like material. In his painting practice, he carves reliefs to use underneath the canvas. Then he presses the canvas against the relief and brushes paint firmly against it, a technique called frottage, or rubbing. For these paintings he has carved reliefs of the Tollund Man, an ancient bog mummy found in Scandinavia, and a mummified dog. In "Shovel Test/Dog," you can discern the large dog as if digging and finding him just below the surface. Additional layers include repeated imagery taken from various sources, including scientific patents for skin grafts. Like the rooms made into camera obscura itself, these paintings reveal themselves slowly, and require intimate slow looking.

The artists and the curator will talk about "Porous Images" on Sept. 29 at 6 p.m. in the Center for the Visual Arts, room 439 on the Boise State Campus. This event is free and open to the public and you can have your own walk-through with the artists. There will also be a closing reception on Friday, Oct. 20, 4-6 p.m. in the Blue Galleries. These events are free and open to the public.

The Blue Galleries are open Tuesday — Friday, 10 a.m. — 5 p.m. during exhibitions and admission is free. They are located on the first floor of the Center for Visual Arts at Boise State, 1110 S Capitol Blvd, Boise, ID 83706. Don't be daunted by Boise State parking. There are handicapped spots just behind the building and regular parking is available a block away in the Brady Garage on Earle Street off University Boulevard.

Driek Zirinsky has collected contemporary art her whole life, a collection of about 1,000 works by Idaho, regional, American and international artists. She is now giving her collection away, making good matches between the works and the institutions. It has been a great ride!
