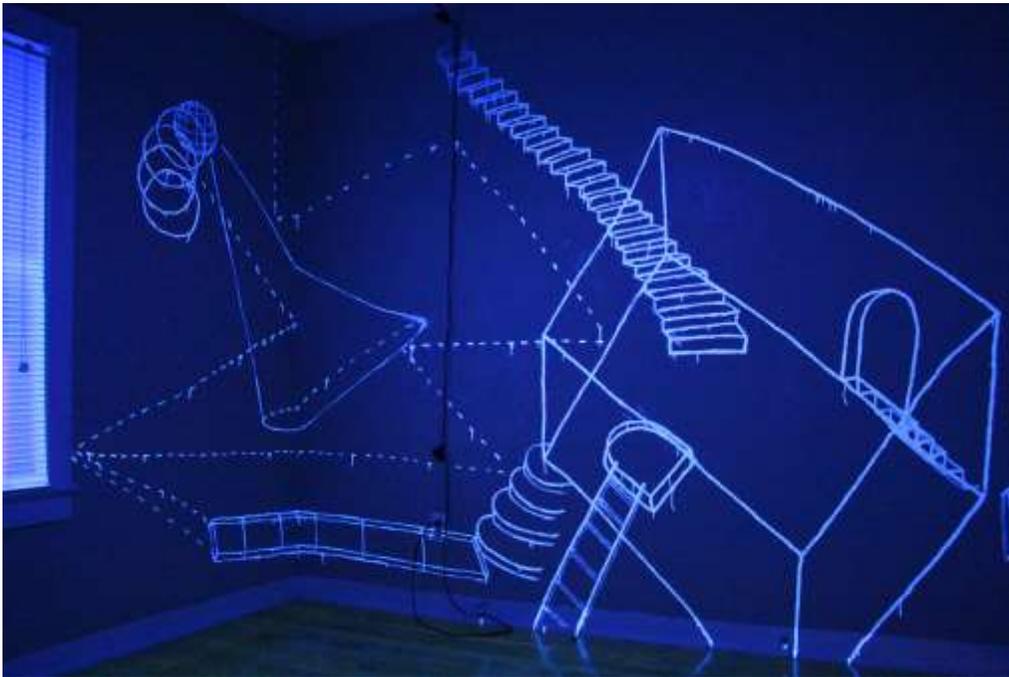


DOUGLAS MILLER
on
Lucia Riffel's *Welcome to Nowhere*



After a tumultuous early November, SOUP experimental's first Portal exhibition felt like a welcome relief. Almost a dozen new and practiced artists filled a home in Levy Park with installations for a one-night only show, creating an otherworldly mash-up of the strange, abject, and the alluring. Among the many worthy pieces at Portal was visual artist Lucia Riffel's *Welcome to Nowhere*, a psychological landscape drawn with laundry detergent which glowed under a black light in a corner bedroom of the house. Loosely based off her series *Night Drawings*, Riffel's piece is a skillful representation of the absurd that offers its viewers a space for cynicism or solidarity in one of our most vulnerable moments.

As you enter the room, as I did many times that night, you will notice that the space is empty and cleanly swept, allowing you to devote your full attention to the connecting ladders, stairways, sidewalks, doors, and rooms drawn on the walls. At first, the 2D figures make the scene feel goofy and lighthearted. But on closer inspection, the piece takes a noticeably nihilistic turn: Riffel's miniatures are out of scale and out of place; the staircases and ladders never seem to lead anywhere or simply drop off the wall; and abstract shapes float

without direction in the ether. One can only conclude that there is no recognizable place but a representation of what existentialists called “the absurd.”

But *Welcome to Nowhere* gives us more than a presentation of our own frustrated efforts to make meaning in a world that gleefully offers none; a purposeful lack of human figures allows viewers to be part of the piece. Some passed over it without recognizing it or meditating on it. Others—and I count myself here--indulged in its transgressive elements (an empty room w/o parents; paint on the walls that glows in the dark; that the paint is laundry detergent; that the miniatures cross boundaries). Of course, the laugh was on us: transgression would be impossible (or absurd?) in “Nowhere,” a world without inherent meaning and moral authority.

But there was another way to interact with the piece (and with the night) too: to follow Camus’ indictment we should embrace the absurd. This looked like taking picture with friends, or spending a quiet moment in the room alone, or being inspired to share a personal story about your week. Patrons were certainly doing this, and while I can’t say this was part of the plan, I hope Riffel would be proud. We may never be able to resolve the contradictions of our lives, but we can certainly feel comfortable with them.

So many of the miniatures created on the walls are from Riffel’s *Night Drawings* series which she began on Tuesday Nov 9 after the presidential election results came in. While there is a need for art to be part of our political response, Riffel’s work is not obviously political, and that’s okay. There is an equal need for communal and meditative art that helps viewers name the absurd condition of our personal and collective life at this crucial juncture. And if art can make the present a little less dark (and a little less serious), it is performing a valuable function indeed.

Lucia Riffel’s Portfolio

www.luciariffel.com/

Thank you Doug.

Sincerely,

SOUP experimental