

## Art

# This is Not a Pipe

Group show not really in the place where you see it

BY KATE NOONAN

**Propositions** | Through March 29 at Area 405



Neal Reinalda's "Not Really Anything At All" (installation view).

**How do you call attention to** a placeless space? That's the question recent MICA graduate Stephen Dewyer attempts to answer in his first curatorial effort, *Propositions* at Area 405. This intriguing and thoughtful group exhibition--featuring the works of regional artists Ding Ren, Neal Reinalda, Glenn Shrum, and Elena Volkova--is both intellectually challenging and curiously entertaining.

The concept of the placeless space was not limited to the exhibition's ideation and installation, it was also integral to the communications that formed it. Mentioned in the catalogue by Dewyer and artists Ren and Shrum, e-mail and the internet played a vital role in transferring ideas and, indeed, actually constructing the works of art. E-mail allowed Dewyer and Ren to trade ideas, gave Shrum the platform to solicit and collect materials, and the internet provides a permanent home to this ephemeral, site-specific exhibition.

In the dark space of Area 405's sprawling galleries, Shrum's installation, "Voltage Drop," employs a carefully chosen light source to highlight the places between spaces. Although it first appears as a haphazard arrangement of multicolored electrical cords draped over a piece of exposed pipe, "Voltage Drop" reveals itself as a precisely constructed, almost scientific study in dimension when viewed from all sides. The electrical cords, which Shrum collected from friends after sending out a mass e-mail, connect in a serpentine line to power the room's only artificial light source. Emitting a crisp white light over the strewn cords, the single beam produces a clear line that travels across the positive and negative spaces when viewed from the side. When viewed from behind the spotlight, however, the wires form a precise, V-shaped tunnel. The work is carefully metered, fragile, and ephemeral: One clumsy move and the effect would be ruined.

Where Shrum plays with the representation of space through light, Ding Ren takes an etymological focus. Her humorous and inquisitive, "The Map Is Not the Territory," installed throughout Area 405's two rooms, is comprised of small framed plaques illustrating real geographic locations and accompanied by succinct written descriptions. At first, the installation feels random, but when more closely examined, you begin to unravel the mystery. The countries were not, in fact, chosen

arbitrarily, but selected based on existing shapes found within the gallery's dilapidated architecture, specifically rusty patches on beams where the paint had chipped away.

Since Ren did not create these markings herself, but came upon them incidentally, "The Map" causes both artist and viewer to take on the role of explorer: Ren discovers and identifies the "locations" and you find them once more throughout the gallery. Without Ren's assigned cartographical identities, these rusty spots would simply be eyesores. But accompanied by their authoritative placards, they gain a weighty significance, that points out both the power and the preposterousness of language: Geographic features always exist, but it is not until they are granted a name that they are deemed real.

Although many of the works in *Propositions* employ a subtle sense of humor, none do more so than those by Neal Reinalda, whose three works provide a much needed balance to the exhibition's brainy conceptualism. His "Not Really Anything at All" manipulates language in a playful manner. Installed on the floor, the piece is sculpted from Styrofoam and coated with faux rock spray paint to form the letters that spell out its title. Funny yet contemplative, it asks you to decide what is real and what is not: This art object claims to be nothing and is constructed from one material masquerading as another, occupying the space between real and constructed identities.

In "7UP", a two-part piece of installation and sly performance art, Reinalda blurs the borders between exhibition and observation. During the exhibition opening, guests were served 7UP soda, while the found-object installation--a clock with the "7" pointing upward--hung almost imperceptibly on the wall. A sort of incognito art, Reinalda's work feels like an inside joke: fun if you know it's there, but unremarkable if you aren't hip to its meaning.

Elena Volkova's "Window Project" is equally understated. Camouflaged by the monochromatic dinginess that pervades the decaying space, the installation is almost unnoticeable until "Window Project" slowly exposes itself: Digital photo prints mounted on invisible fishing line hang over selected panes of the gallery's walled-in windows. Panel by panel, you're forced to distinguish the real glass window panes from their paper doppelgangers and, suddenly, you are confronted with the notions of representation and reality. Volkova, who regularly explores the idea of both physical and conceptual borders in her work, seeks to blur them here as the lines between what is real and what is not intersect and grow fuzzy.