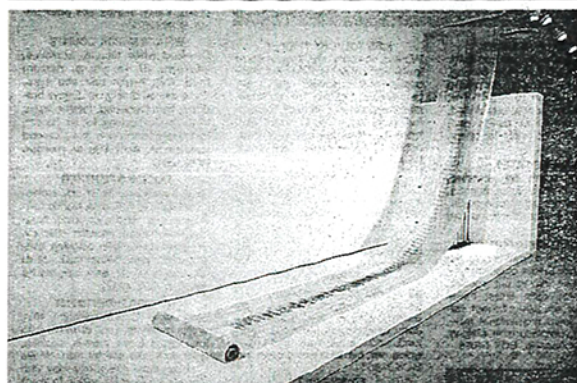


# ART

Nov. 1-8



"Elements," one of Sharon McConnell's large-scale sculptures rendered in pig gut, is on exhibit in Big Orbit Gallery.

## REVIEW

**WHAT:** "Sharon McConnell: Trace Elements"

**WHEN:** Through Nov. 16

**WHERE:** Big Orbit Gallery, 30-D Essex St.

**ADMISSION:** Free  
**INFO:** 883-3209

## Artful anatomy

Fiber-based works are minimalist views of the human body

**BY BRUCE ADAMS**  
News Contributing Reviewer

The human body has served as a source of artistic inspiration ever since our ancient ancestors crawled out of the primordial ooze to contemplate their mortality. Ever since — from the plump iconic femininity of the prehistoric "Venus of Willendorf" to the recent self-mutilating body art of Chris Burden — artists have endeavored to define the nature and limitations of that vessel of the human spirit.

At first glance, Sharon McConnell's two-dimensional serial pieces and large-scale sculpture — currently on view at Big Orbit Gallery — seem unrelated to the hu-

man body. They appear as straightforward minimalist ruminations until upon closer inspection their deceptive simplicity gives way to multiple allusions of human biology.

Moreover, instead of distancing the audience with carefully constructed coolness as minimalism often does, McConnell's fiber-based works possess a delicately seductive character, infused with an emotional resonance that draws the viewer in. This visceral attraction is largely dependent on the artist's two principal materials, the first and most significant being pig gut.

Contrary to expectations, McConnell processes the gut into parchmentlike gossamer sheets the color of pale flesh. Onto this delicately textured translucent skin she embroiders blood-red symbolic images or text. This flesh and blood metaphor and evocative stitching combine to form a kind of reductionist view of human temporal existence.

A case in point is the monumental sculptural piece titled "Elements," which reduces the human body to a short list of active ingredients. A yard-wide gut scroll unfurls from ceiling to floor forming a gentle diagonal slope. Down the front is embroidered a list of chemical elements found in the human body. Beneath the scroll, loose strands of embroidery thread stream down, forming crimson pools on a vivid white base. The draped shroudlike material and cascading red thread create an effect that is alternately dramatic and

subtle. The whole piece emits an inner glow suggestive of a spiritual presence, and pleads the case for humanity as something more than simply the sum of its parts.

Across the room, a wall-mounted work titled "Tracery" continues the theme of human mortality. It is comprised of 20 enlarged sets of embroidered thumbprints, each centrally positioned on an 18-inch by 18-inch sheet of gut mounted on white felt. The label states that each set consists of an overlay of a parent and child's thumbprint.

The superimposed linear prints — perhaps suggestive of genetic fingerprints — delicately merge into unpredictable patterns. Dangling red thread-ends hint at trickling blood, giving the patterns the faint, unsettling appearance of flesh wounds. All this contributes to a sense impending loss; recognition of the ephemeral nature of the human body.

Variations on the body theme are employed throughout the exhibition. In "Cell Matter," McConnell stitches textbook style illustrations of human organ cells onto the gut material. For "Study for Leavings," she employs twisted floral images that mimic human organs. In every instance, the dark and weighty subject matter is rendered palatable through the delicate allure of intelligent design. •

## PREVIEW

**WHAT:** Eighth biennial Ways in Being Gay festival

**WHEN:** Saturday through Nov. 24

**WHERE:** Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Tri-Main Building, 2495 Main St.

**ADMISSION:** Screenings are \$4 to \$6

**INFO:** 835-7362 or [www.hallwalls.org](http://www.hallwalls.org)

## Talking proud

Insightful films, readings depict Ways in Being Gay

**BY RICHARD HUNTINGTON**  
News Art Critic

The eighth Ways in Being Gay, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center's biennial festival of gay and lesbian art, will be appropriately launched Wednesday night with an evening devoted to the humor-



"She uses parody in a way that underscores butch identities in mass culture." Hallwalls' Joanna Raczyńska on Liss Platt's video work

ous-but pointed videos of Liss Platt.

Platt, who will be on hand, has a playful, sometimes campy style that parodies many things, especially the mainstream culture's skewed take on gayness.

In the expressions of the mainstream, most noticeable perhaps in television, the idea of a gay lifestyle can never be presented without the cover of mannered humor, outright caricature or some elaborate fictional framework.

Gay life, it seems, is seldom seen as just there, like a real and valid cultural fact. These characterizations offer a ridiculously rich field for parody.

Joanna Raczyńska, recently arrived to Hallwalls as media curator, curated the festival with Stephanie Gray and Kelly Spizey, both of Squeaky Wheel (the media resource center on Elmwood Avenue). Raczyńska sees Platt as a cultural commentator of major stature. "She uses parody in a way that underscores butch identities in mass culture," she says.

Besides being an active solo videomaker, Platt often works in tandem with another artist.

Raczyńska says that, interestingly, one of her collaborators was Kathy High, a video artist who was part of Hallwalls in the 1980s and played a big part in the city's hyperactive media arts scene. (In 1983, High was certainly the first — and probably the last — video artist to attempt to document Artpark's outdoor sculptures with a hand-held camera while riding on a golf cart.)

After the opening, the festival will continue in Hallwalls and other venues through Nov. 24. The videos and films will range from shorts by young artists, many local, to full-length features by well-established figures on the international scene.

Among the latter is Indian-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta, whose remarkable and highly emotional 1996 film "Fire," will be

screened Nov. 15 in the Market Arcade Film and Arts Center (855-3022).

The range of the offerings promises to be immense. Su Friedrich's film "The Odds of Recovery" (Hallwalls, Nov. 24) is a very personal look at the problems that come with illness and the difficulties of dealing with the medical establishment that, theoretically at least, is there to cure us.

Then there's Jennifer Arnold's video "American Mullet" (Hallwalls, Nov. 20). The video tells of a cross-country jaunt that seeks out the varied (and sometimes interestingly gendered) patrons of seedy bars and line-dancing saloons, among other assorted — and sort-of — hangouts.

Arnold encounters butch dykes, aging rockers, fanatical NASCAR fans, bikers of various ilk and country-western crooners of one sort or another.

Raczyńska has many good things to say about the accomplished documentary videomaker Deborah Dickson.

Her "Ruthie and Connie: Every Room in the House" (Hallwalls, Nov. 17) relates the lives of two remarkable Jewish grandmothers who, not incidentally, are also activist lesbians. Raczyńska just learned that Dickson will be there to introduce the compelling story of these women.

Among a number of performances is Susana Cook's "Spice for Export" (Hallwalls, Nov. 2). Cook has been called one of New York City's hottest lesbian performers.

Then, as the festival winds down, a potpourri of area performers will appear at "Out in the Open." This open mic night will be held Nov. 21 in Rust Belt Books, 202 Allen St.

For a complete schedule of events and tickets (\$4 to \$10), call Hallwalls at 835-7362 or go online at [www.hallwalls.org](http://www.hallwalls.org). •

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