

# Portland2016 Biennial offers broadest survey yet of contemporary art in Oregon



By **Special to The Oregonian**

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on July 04, 2016 at 5:00 AM

What you won't get from "**Portland2016**," the fourth iteration of Disjecta's biennial of contemporary art that opens in Salem on July 8 and across the state on July 9, is a slick survey or a show where the curatorial voice permeates every aspect. But the vision of its curator, **Michelle Grabner**, is exactly why you should be interested in seeing this year's biennial.

Grabner is a well-regarded artist, curator and educator whose bona fides include co-curating the **2014 Whitney Biennial**. While she takes pains to disassociate herself from being the show's imprimatur – "I follow the artist's lead," she insists – it's her involvement that the show's organizers are counting on to bring a more national eye to the art being produced in Oregon today.

Disjecta's biennial picks up where the Oregon Biennial left off. That show, hosted by the Portland Art Museum, ran from 1949 until 2006. Disjecta reintroduced the biennial in 2010 – renamed "Portland2010" – with an exhibition of 19 artists in nine venues throughout Portland. "Portland2012" presented the work of 24 artists at five venues, and "Portland2014" showed 15 artists. "Portland2016" is infinitely more ambitious than anything that has come before.

With Grabner on board and with her only directive to continue the tradition of using multiple venues for the show, she has conceived of a vast undertaking that extends into 12 communities across the state and showcases the work of 34 artists representing different media: Photographer **Whitney Minthorn**, video artist **Julia Oldham**, painter **Pat Boas** and conceptual jeweler **Anya Kivarkis**, among others. In Portland, a show of the 106 artists who received studio visits from Grabner will be hung salon-style in Disjecta's main gallery space.

If numbers are bandied about a lot with this year's biennial, that's intentional. Disjecta's executive director, Bryan Suereth, wants to make the point that this is the most comprehensive survey of Oregon artists ever. Is bigger better? Not always, but in this case, the sheer scale of the enterprise, its geographical breadth and the number of artists it takes in, as well as the rationale behind that decision, make the biennial something of a work of art in its own right. And it's what makes it so intriguing.

Grabner is an established artist who has served on the faculty of the **School of the Art Institute of Chicago** since 1996. For her part, expanding the show meant making it "artist-centric" and opening the curatorial process to the audience. To address a somewhat academic interest in ideas of regionalism and localism, she took the tack of moving the artists selected for "Portland2016" around. Thus, the mainstays of Portland's established art scene like **Storm Tharp** – and a number of emerging Portland-based artists like **Brenna Murphy** – find themselves in spaces in Pendleton, Madras and Ashland, while many of the 13 artists who live and work outside Portland that were chosen for the exhibition will be shown in Portland venues.

The intention behind such choices is twofold. Grabner wants to push artists in new directions, and both she and Suereth want to expose audiences to different artists and vice versa. Such is the case with **Jessica Jackson Hutchins**, perhaps the artist with the most national recognition of the group, who for Portland2016 has an installation at the Christian Science Reading Room in

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Pendleton. "You think about place," says Grabner, "and challenge her, giving her a site and an audience that's new to her."

At the same time that Grabner is trying to open a window onto what can be a rarefied world of those who "get" contemporary art and those who don't, Suereth is hoping that her very stature within this world will be what draws visitors from within and from outside the state.

"People will want to come out and see who this person thinks the best artists in the state are," he says, and that, in turn, "opens up opportunities for recognition that you don't find if you don't have the kind of recognition that Michelle has."

It may be well worth a trip or two, or even an extended summer road trip, to see the various sites of this biennial, and its organizers are hoping that's what you'll do. But, per Suereth, "If you can't get to every venue and just come to the center, you get one hell of an overview of the state of art in Oregon."

--Briana Miller, for The Oregonian/OregonLive

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## "Portland2016"

**When:** July 9-Sept. 18

**Where:** At 25 locations throughout Oregon, with venues in Ashland, Clatskanie, The Dalles, Pendleton and Astoria, among others. The 10 Portland locations include:

- Disjecta Contemporary Art Center, 8371 N. Interstate Ave. Noon-5 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday.
- Portland State University's College of the Arts, Broadway Lobby Gallery, 1620 S.W. Park Ave. 7:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday
- Reed College Library, Cooley Gallery Case Works Program, 3203 S.E. Woodstock Blvd. 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.
- Project Grow, 2156 N. Williams Ave. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday-Friday, noon-5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.
- White Box, 24 N.W. First Ave. Noon-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

For a complete listing of artists, locations and hours, go to [portlandbiennial.org](http://portlandbiennial.org).

**Tickets:** Free.

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