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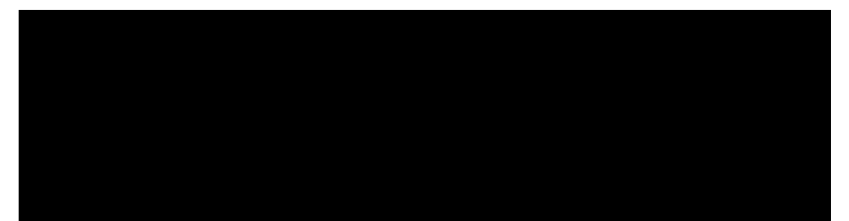
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ART REVIEW: Richard Lewis's video exhibition takes a shot at meaning of life

Tucked away in the Campus Center at Salem State University, the Winfisky Gallery is easy to miss. Take the time to find it in the next few weeks; Richard Lewis has a story to tell. The longtime photography professor at the university has installed his latest video/sound/text exhibition, "THERE is no THERE THERE: The Na..."









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'THERE is no THERE THERE' runs through Feb. 3 in the Winfisky Gallery in the Ellison Campus Center at Salem State University. Admission is free.



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By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Jan. 22, 2016 at 2:33 PM

SALEM

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If you go...

WHAT: 'THERE is no THERE THERE: The Narrated Self'

WHERE: Winfisky Gallery, Ellison Campus Center, Salem State University

WHEN: through Feb. 3



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Tucked away in the Campus Center at Salem State University, the Winfisky Gallery is easy to miss. Take the time to find it in the next few weeks; Richard Lewis has a story to tell.

The longtime photography professor at the university has installed his latest video/sound/text exhibition, "THERE is no THERE THERE: The Narrated Self," a 12-minute, triptych-paneled exploration inspired by a loopy 19th century novella, a social commentary entitled "Flatland."

"Flatland," written by Englishman Edwin Abbott Abbott, and built around the mysterious premise that different worlds with differing dimensions not only exist but interact, serves as a starting point for Lewis's narration about perception and progress.

The darkened gallery has video screens on three sides. Each has a different story line, synched so that they overlap gently, allowing the viewer to "keep track" of the narration. Each video has text and images, and ambient music — occasionally overlaid with newscaster-type monologue — fills the space. The whole experience is calm and deliberate — the video sometimes so slow that the images begin to melt, in a way, blurring almost to unrecognizability.

The middle video panel reveals the central premise: "He knew some elemental force had brought him into existence," followed a few minutes later with, "he was wrong." The omniscient narrator keeps the thread moving. At the right panel, a satiric narrative about progress — complete with hamster on a wheel — unfolds. To the left, more specific references to "Flatland," with an enigmatic conclusion ("it fills all space ... and what it fills, it is") seems to comment on it all.

"It's the story of a life, in one way, in a larger sense it's how we construct meaning for our lives," Lewis says. "I'm trying to take over a space and create a mood, rather than show a video."

"THERE" does create a mood. The images shift from the natural world (goldfish, frogs, the hamster) to old-timey movie clips of women dancing, or cowboys on a horse. A boxing clip enters to the right, toward the end, the combatants so blurred they are unrecognizable.

"Flatland" looms over it all. "It's one of the trippiest books you'll ever read," Lewis says. "I find it fits in perfectly with what I'm trying to do. It's about different dimensions, and how we try to make sense of the world from our perspective. And how much we miss, and how wrong we can be."

One viewing immediately leaves you feeling like you want to view again. The sense that you can more readily connect the dots, that you can create the "perfect" interpretation, is palpable. But that interpretation remains elusive, even through successive viewings. The story — and that might be the overarching point — keeps moving away.

"We mythologize our lives, making ourselves the heroes of our own movies," Lewis says. "This installation examines that, and is part of it."

The soundscape enhances this feeling. Largely ambient, swirling around the space, the inscrutable narration coming and going, at first the sound adds to the frustration. A guitar ostinato, leading to an expected climax, doesn't help — in fact it adds to the idea that there is something to grasp, and that it's close at hand.

But that meaning stays just out of reach.

"I like to leave stuff a little hard to follow," Lewis says. "If you have an obvious meaning, and you deliver it to the viewer, then the viewer says 'Okay, I'm done.' Meaning doesn't lie with me, and then I deliver it to you. I don't believe that. Everyone brings an experience, their own experience, to the images."

"THERE is no THERE THERE" runs through Feb. 3 in the Winfisky Gallery in the Ellison Campus Center at Salem State University. Admission is free. For information visit www.salemstate.edu or call 978-542-7890.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for the GateHouse Media newspapers. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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Monday, January 25, 2016						
Free adult education classes						8:30 am
Wellspring House						
Manchester COA Monday Movie						1:30 pm
Newport Park						
Yoga at Rockport High/Middle School						5:00 pm
Rockport High/Middle School						
Fitness Class at Rockport Elementary School						6:30 pm
Rockport Elementary School gym						
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Rockport Elementary School gym						
More Events »				Add Events »		
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