

Social Stimuli

Eyedrum exhibitions deconstruct the cultural impact of sight and sound

BY FELICIA FEASTER

In *Painted Screens*, curated by local artist Travis T. Pack, Oliver Smith's fascinating work "Television" does what many successful artworks do. It takes something ubiquitous and unquestioned, like gender roles and the way TV has insinuated itself like a virus into our lives, and reminds us of its ultimate importance. "Television" centers on a creaky black-and white, 1940s-era industrial film explaining the marvel of television. The film, with its hazy borders and murky second-generation imagery, unfolds like a dream. The menfolk fondle their cathode tubes and control panels, and the women pose willingly to illustrate what this technology can do. Without its soundtrack, the piece looks like a point-by-point explanation of some ancient religious cult that worshiped TV. Or, as a quote from that stodgy grad school ideologue Karl Marx, which Smith cannily references, warns: "They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations."

Amen, and pass the remote. Smith, like the other two artists participating in *Painted Screens*, has thought long and hard about all the ways conventions of TV and film have informed how we see the world.

In "(In)visible Frenzy," a work displayed on two televisions, Smith continues his critique of the way porn films make women into objects. But the distorted images and too much technological fiddling muddle Smith's worthy message. One would be hard-pressed to realize that the images come from porn without reading the artist's statement.