

CRISTIN TIERNEY

WILLAMETTE WEEK

Converge 45 Might Be The Arts Festival Portland Needs

Converge's second iteration starts this week with a mix of performance art, large-scale installations and gallery shows from local and national artists.



By Shannon Gormley

Published August 9

For a growing art scene, festivals are essential. A well-curated arts festival can give a city the kind of national recognition that encourages innovation on a local level. But festivals that are too locally focused often miss the opportunity to connect artists with larger markets, while a festival that's too ambitious can mean forsaking a wieldable vision at the expense of the attendee and the resources available to the artists.

Converge 45 strikes the right balance. Founded last year by influential Portland gallery owner and art dealer Elizabeth Leach, it's again curated by another key figure in the Portland art scene, Kristy Edmunds, who founded PICA and TBA. Converge's second iteration starts this week with a mix of performance art, large-scale installations and gallery shows from local and national artists. It's ambitious programming full of complex multimedia work.

But what makes Converge seem so promising isn't so much its bounds as its limits—it still seems intimate. It's a relatively small lineup, consisting of only 25 artists spread over a manageable eight venues (including Jennifer Steinkamp's exhibit at the Portland Art Museum). Most shows are free to the public. Many of those artists have been collaborating with Edmunds since last year's festival.

In a way, the ideal arts festival requires thinking big and small at the same time. Here are the four works in this year's Converge that seem most likely to do just that. See the full schedule on converge45.org.

Choreography for Reading Aloud and Nothing Is Natural

On Friday, Reed's campus will be overrun with performance art. In the library, artists in *Choreography for Reading Aloud*, by Portlander MK Guth, will devise an abstract performance piece based on books they find onsite. Around the spring that runs through the campus, three artist collectives (R.I.S.E., Winter Count and Postcommodity) will unite for a call-and-response performance titled *Nothing Is Natural*. There'll be art exhibits relating to the performances' pieces displayed on the campuses until October 1, but the morning of the performances offers something that all good arts festivals should: something that's both ephemeral and strange. *Reed College, 3203 SE Woodstock Blvd. 11 am Friday, August 11.*