

The Right Here Showcase

By Halle Mason

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Image courtesy [Right Here Showcase](#)

Minnesota, and the Twin Cities specifically, sustains a vibrant arts culture. There seems constant support for emerging as well as established artists. But Paul Herwig, artistic director of Off-Leash Area, recognized a niche in the arts scene that deserved to be addressed.

“There’s not really an accessible program in the community that highlights and honors the work of Minnesota-based mid-career artists,” Herwig explains, pointing out that these artists warrant a wider audience. “Every time the Walker does its ‘Out There’ series, they always do really well in terms of attendance.”

Institutionally speaking, there are places in town that present mid-career artists, acknowledges Herwig. “But they’re either not from Minnesota or they’re very narrowly set aesthetic viewpoints,” adhering to parameters set by marketing. He also admits, “Fundors tend to not pay attention to the mid-career artists because emerging artists are more sexy.”

So what does one do when the arts community fails to provide recognition for an entire subset of artists? Isn’t the answer obvious? Create your own showcase. That’s exactly what Herwig did.

In 2015 Herwig founded the “Right Here Showcase,” an arts event that provides a commission of \$1,000 to four Minnesota-based mid-career artists. Herwig reflects on the showcase’s first year positively. “This is a one-grant project, so the budget is small—it’s really a seed project right now,” he explains. “But with that in mind, we actually did really well.” In a small theater of only 100 seats, the showcase reached 70 percent capacity, abetted by social-media marketing.

Now in its second year, the “Right Here Showcase” welcomes four mid-career artists to the Illusion Theater on April 1-3 and 8-10: dance artist Penelope Freeh, composer and multi-media artist Craig Harris, live artist and director Melissa Birth, and dance artist Megan Mayer.

Though Herwig is the spearhead of the showcase, he relies on the opinions of his artist-filled panel, who sift through the applicants and recommend particularly interesting and contemporary talent.

The showcase itself focuses on contemporary work, but Herwig acknowledges that it’s a term with a lot of different interpretations. He and the committee look for artists who are creating original work and playing with the form they’re working in. This permits a “kind of viewpoint that allows the showcase to be able to embrace and present artists in a much wider range.”

Herwig depends upon his panel to keep the artists as the focus. “The showcase isn’t about me making an artistic statement; it’s not about me; and it’s not about our company. It’s about presenting mid-career artists who are local.”