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Rejection letters make up focus of Beaverton artist's installation

BY SHASTA KEARNS MOORE
The Beaverton Valley Times, Oct 9, 2008

Rejection letters can be thrown out, burned, or perhaps even kept in a secret place way in the back of the filing cabinet. But rarely are thousands of people encouraged and invited to read a person's rejection letters – drawn in by mechanical voices reading those letters aloud.

Beaverton artist Dan Senn has done just that with his new installation "Fanning Rejection" in the lobby of the Portland Public Service Building in downtown Portland.

In an alcove of the main entrance, 12 slightly curled facsimiles of letters Senn received during a search for a professorship of music in the late-1970s



L.E. BASKOW / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP
VALIDATION — Beaverton artist Dan Senn stands with his "Fanning Rejection" art installation of rejection letters he received in 1978.

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hang from speaker wire. The letters dance lightly in the wind of a oscillating fan while a randomly selected few are read by computer voices, transmitted down the speaker wire to the coins, poker chips and piezos acting as speakers attached to the letters.

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“In all candor, we must suggest that you do not presently fulfill our minimum requirements in one area or another,” the computer reads emotionlessly from a letter from Lycoming College in Pennsylvania.

Senn eventually found a professorship at the University of Canberra School of Music in Australia and, since then, has led an enviable life of an award-winning artist who installs unique art projects across the United States, Europe and elsewhere.

“So you see, I’m not such a reject,” Senn said with a laugh.

The artist invented what he calls “pendulum-based instruments,” which are objects mounted on a vibrating string.

“I can control the movement, the rocking of the pendulum, with sound you can’t hear but you can see,” Senn said.

Then, he brings up the vibrations to the point where the motion stops, but the sound is then audible.

“Much of my work works right across that divide,” he said. “Oftentimes it seems magical because of that, even to me.”

Visitors to the University of Washington-Tacoma can see an example of pendulum instruments at a permanent installation that has been operating since 1999. Senn also created a permanent Sound Garden in Tacoma at Point Defiance.

This latest work will run until Friday, Oct. 31, and is already getting interested comments from passersby.

“It’s a really cool idea, this whole monument to rejection,” said employee Matt Cavaness as he stopped to read the letters.

In a guest book, one woman wrote a lengthy passage encouraging Senn to keep trying and not to give up, despite his failures, a sentiment that surprised the artist.

“I didn’t think they would react this way. I’m actually quite successful,” he said.

See more of Senn’s work at www.newsense-intermedium.com.

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