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CRITICS' PICKS

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Portland

Fawn Krieger

PICA - THE PORTLAND INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL
531 SE 14th Ave.

September 3–October 18

On Fawn Krieger's project journal, the artist traces the evolution of *National Park*, 2009, a huge, mountable terrain—replete with grotto—based on the Ape Cave in Washington's Mount St. Helens. Installed in the empty library of a former public high school as part of the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's 2009 Visual Art Program, Krieger's artificial landmass subsumes the space, which is lined with rotating pencil sharpeners along its open windows. The artist built the work on a roller-coaster-like wooden frame with a bevy of local volunteers during a residency, and its engineering is no mean feat, considering the work is as painstakingly handmade as a county-fair quilt.

To create the "park," Krieger surveyed Portland's surrounding wilds, retracing her experience of a 1984 family vacation to the same locations. The work's meandering terrain of vistas, made from tar-drenched foam rubber, felt, and concrete plateaus, nooks, and boulders, evokes the life and death of relationships—familial, environmental, and material. Intimately, the work imprints the visitor with small scrapes and sticky stains. It's a dystopian space, but it carries an aura of hope by proffering the visitor a position of privilege. Krieger's haptic representation of imagined nature resists craftiness through peril; the work is sculptural, crude, and gutsy.

Like other pseudo-natural environments built by artists such as Fritz Haeg, Krieger's metaphoric space serves as an arena for various events, including her continued interpretations of the site. Krieger's *National Park* has no real rules, and the work's vulnerability places the burden of preservation on the visitor. This temporary, artificial world isn't made to last—it's made to witness, primarily through the slow disintegration of the piece itself.



Fawn Krieger, *National Park*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view.