

# Worth another look from any angle

By **BRIAN LIBBY**

SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

When visiting Jerry Mayer's "2d/3d" show at Clark College's Archer Gallery in Vancouver, don't be afraid to stand up on your tiptoes or kneel down.

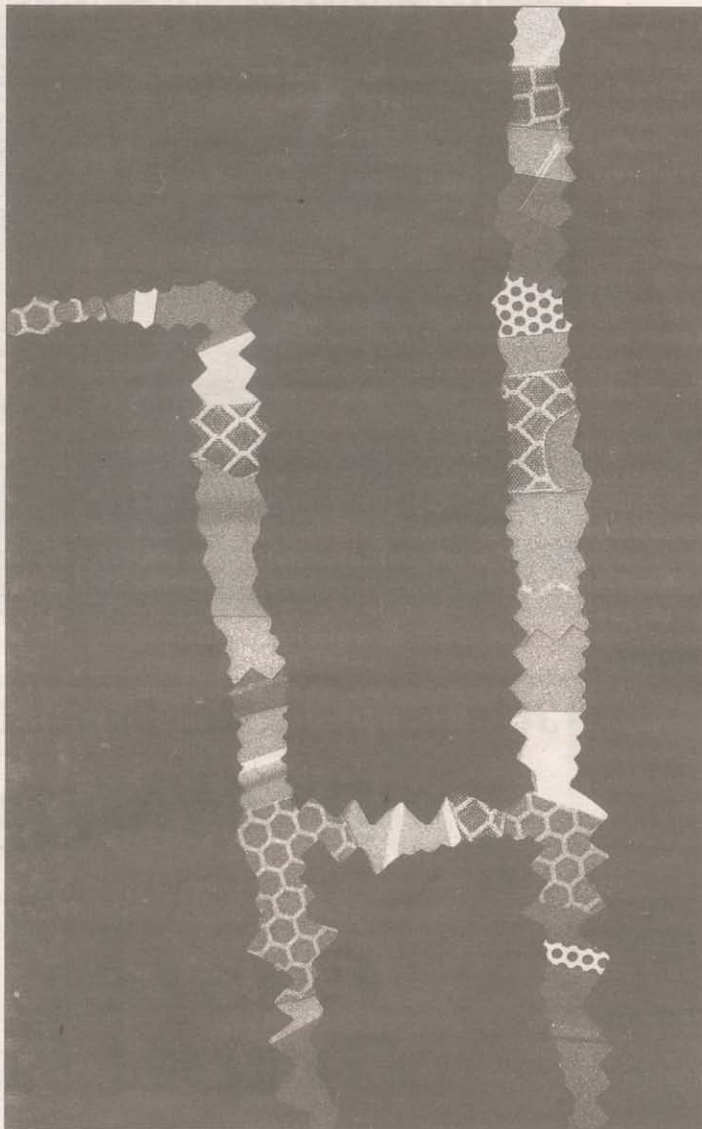
The show consists largely of a series of small plaques made with the same material used for highway signs. It's a highly reflective surface, one of several unconventional materials the self-taught artist has worked with in a career spanning 25 years. As a result, viewing Mayer's work varies a great deal depending on the angle or the light source, but always it warrants a second or third look for deeper appreciation.

On a visit to Archer Gallery on the morning of Mayer's April 4 opening, I watched as a small group of art students persuaded Archer director Marjorie Hirsch to briefly turn off the overhead lights. The only illumination came from a glass doorway in one corner of the gallery — not nearly enough to view most artworks. Yet the effect that small strip of sunlight had on Mayer's artwork was mesmerizing. New patterns emerged, and layers revealed themselves.

This reflectivity is particularly prominent in the several numbered works composing the "Twelve" series. Mayer has created an array of patterns based on monochromatic clusters of tiny pentagon-shaped cells that form the background of many signs. He arranges the clusters into circles, squares, long loops and other patterns against differently colored backgrounds. In one, a red hue gives the cold metallic surface a dose of energy and warmth. In another, a gray-purple feels more aloof, but an assortment of symmetrically aligned shapes of different sizes have a playful manner.

The artist's "Screen" series is comprised of perforated aluminum strips that look almost like rectangular doilies. Underneath the perforation, the artist has layered other differently shaped pieces of metal and other materials. The emphasis here is not on reflecting light so much as on presenting textured layers. The delicacy of the pieces contrasts the harness of their metallic periphery.

Mayer takes this strategy further with the "Black" series, consisting of eight postcard-sized pieces that are covered mostly in black vinyl, revealing the contours of layered contents underneath in a cookie-cutter-like window. You probably wouldn't expect pieces covered in common electrical tape available



**"Black #6" by Jerry Mayer. A studio artist whose work is as noncommercial as his public art and design, Mayer has quietly built a career of substance and intellectual intrigue.**

from a hardware store to have such expressive quality. But the softness of the vinyl emphasizes the subtle shapes of the scattered materials underneath.

A co-founder of the nonprofit Nine Gallery in Portland (which shares space with Blue Sky Gallery in the Pearl District), Mayer is probably best known for his public art, working with both TriMet and Seattle's Sound Transit on

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## review

2d/3d

**What:** Works by Jerry Mayer

**Where:** Archer Gallery, Penguin Student Union Building at Clark College, Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver, Wash.

**Closes:** April 30

design works, and as part of a team developing and implementing a variety of art system-wide. His career has never been geared toward commercial galleries; he's thus kept a lower art world profile than might have been possible given his talent.

But through many shows at Nine Gallery and elsewhere over the years, the longtime Portland and now Vancouver-based artist has established an impressively delicate touch with found objects and industrial materials.

Nowhere is this truer than with Mayer's light sculpture, "Janus." Taking its name from the mythological Roman god of doorways and passages, the sculpture's form is a kind of boomerang-shaped tube with wide openings at either end, mounted a few feet above the ground. "Janus" is made from fiber-optic cable that, once plugged into two small chargers, transmits light. In other words, the sculpture acts as its own source of illumination.

With this portion of the gallery devoid of other light sources, the sculpture glows and flickers with constantly changing colors. It can seem warm and joyful one moment, cool and lonely the next. In either case, the light and color give the sculpture an emotional resonance that transcends its utilitarian materials.

Or maybe it's just the opposite: that Mayer's work, not just in this sculpture or this show but throughout his career, is about elevating industrial detritus into something more mysterious and alluring. It's not ironic like Pop art, but sincere, reminding us that even amid the mass production of our time, each material can manifest itself in different ways.