

CRISTIN TIERNEY

WILLAMETTE WEEK

Salt Lick Sculptures Are at the Center of a New Permanent Exhibit at the Portland Art Museum

The works were placed across the state and surveilled them with motion-sensitive trail cameras to capture Oregon fauna confronting the art.



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Salt Lick Art (Malia Jensen)

By Jay Horton July 13, 2022 at 5:30 am PDT

Purchased this spring by the Portland Art Museum for its permanent collection, Portland mixed-media artist Malia Jensen's remarkable installation *Nearer Nature: Worth Your Salt* now plays continuously. Two synced screens have been divided into eight discrete perspectives displaying the same footage so slightly separated by starting time that the barely observed figures on one screen appear to echo on the next. For the piece, Jensen fashioned salt licks into pieces that form a human body (a foot, a pair of breasts, a pile of doughnuts representing a stomach), then placed those sculptures across the state and surveilled them with motion-sensitive trail cameras to capture Oregon fauna confronting the art.

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The self-described “sculptor working in video” collaborated with local video editor Ben Mercer to formulate a sequential structure encompassing the mathematical realities of rendering watchable footage amassed from six distinct sites filmed by three cameras each. “Basically,” she says, “the template meant we wouldn’t need to watch the footage before sequencing. Our organizing principle was literally grouped by time.”

While this meant they’d never need to “skim tens of thousands of clips to delete the occasional hiker or glitch, there was still a huge amount of editing,” Jensen says. “Making the larger piece required weaving all these different sequences together into a French braid of complex footage combinations.”

Jensen isn’t sure how many observers have seen the work in its quarter-day entirety, but the museum has provided a viewing bench, she notes. “There’s an immersive meditative quality meant to take you out of life’s daily torments. You can sit there tucked away for hours if you want.”



Jay Horton

Jay Horton is a longtime correspondent and jack-of-all-arts-coverage: music, film, theater, food, television, books, dance and college football special teams, to taste. Follow him on Twitter @Hortland.