

# Letting artists do their thing pays off

By **JAMES AUER**  
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I've always admired inova's willingness to take a chance on younger talent, turning it loose in a room with art materials and the injunction simply to be creative.

## ART REVIEW

As our pre-eminent promulgator of the international *avant-garde*, inova, on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus, has won a few and lost a few. But consistently, its videos and installations have justified the gamble.

Its current round of solo shows by artists from around the world reflects considerable credit on inova's director, Peter Doroshenko, and senior curator, Marilu Knode, for their willingness to invite artists to do their thing, unhampered by rigid conditions or administrative meddling.

Two of the experimental videos in particular are challenging and fun.

For breathtaking audacity, it would be hard to beat Illya Chichkan's brazenly opportunistic *tour de force*, "Atomic Love."

A post-apocalyptic riff on that giddy French musical romance, "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg," it is set in the abandoned — and still lethally radioactive — Ukrainian city of Chernobyl.

Shot largely with hand-held cameras, the piece shows a pair of protectively garbed lovers awkwardly acting out their passion against a monochromatic background of ruined reactors and hastily vacated apartment buildings.

Chichkan, who grew up 40 miles away in Kiev, somehow persuaded the authorities to let him, his crew and cast shoot this quasi-erotic drama during a tour of the closed, and still contaminated, town.

The result is brief (just seven minutes long), jerky and contrasty yet eerily effective — a kind of atomic-age "Kama Sutra," with physical love triumphing over the menace of



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**Barthélemy Togo's** "Pure and Clean," a room-filling installation at inova, takes viewers into the chaotic mind of a doll-like figure named Lily.

residual radioactivity and desire blanking out the very real risk of begetting genetically altered offspring.

### Invigorating and dehumanizing

Almost the diametric opposite of "Atomic Love" is Ilppo Pohjola's marvelously shot (on black-and-white, Super-8 film) and edited wide-screen production, "Routemaster — Theater of the Motor."

Pohjola, who lives in Finland, filmed the raw materials — scenes of movement, sports cars, blurry vistas, a fast-moving streetscape — in Helsinki, then had the footage transferred to video and spent seven weeks working with an editor to turn it into a stunning combination of visuals and sound.

Thanks to multiple audio tracks and tight, rhythmic editing, skillfully reiterated frames and amorphous, ambiguous images, it is at once an invigorating and a dehumanizing experience.

(From time to time, as if to prove to us that we're all mortal, Pohjola throws in color footage of crash-test dummies.)

In this way, the viewer becomes both essential to the totality of the piece and disposable as a victim or voyeur.

By shooting on fast, narrow-gauge film, Pohjola gets a physical image, grainy yet subtly modulated, that is far

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