

# Chicago Tribune

## Meeting at the intersection of blue and white

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by Lori Waxman | Special to the Tribune

We tend to think of collaboration as something that happens intentionally. A certain number of people agree to work together, and jointly they produce a project.

These people might be scientists, they might be educators, they might be marketing executives. Or they might be artists, like the local groups ED JR. and (f)utility projects, who worked together to put on the "CoLaboratory" exhibition at Columbia College's Glass Curtain Gallery.

ED JR., which formed in 2010, consists of Edra Soto, Deborah Boardman, Jeroen Nelemans and Ryan Richey. (f)utility, founded in 2009, is Paola Cabal, Michael Genge and Christopher Grieshaber. Eight of ED JR.'s collectively created video paintings, disarmingly simple geometric exercises built of luminescent blue lines and graceful human shadows, project on and through the adjustable white scrims that (f)utility have arranged throughout the gallery space.

No two collaboratives work in quite the same way. Some follow a set of rules, others proceed improvisationally. In ED JR., one member acts as videographer, another as DJ. Everyone paints straight lines, and only in indigo blue ink. When visitors joined in for an open session on opening night at the Glass Curtain Gallery, preset guidelines disintegrated in the face of excitement. The results, which constitute one of the video displays, reveal the chaos of many people painting, but as individuals rather than as one. Unchecked lines resolve energetically into a street, a maze, tic-tac-toe, a braid, the horizon — and eventually an illegible muddle.

Successful or not, all of these collaborations happened purposefully. But perhaps another kind of collaboration exists, one that happens accidentally. This might be a way to describe the coincidence of, say, a shoe store advertisement appearing in a newspaper opposite a report on newly discovered apatosaurus footprints.

Or the unexpected correspondences that occurred last week, on the day I happened to visit "CoLaboratory." Later that morning I found myself in Tony Wight Gallery on an errand, and there on the wall hung a 1974 photogram by Barbara Kasten, one of Chicago's most respected senior photographers, known for transforming architecture into fragmented shards of a neon rainbow, all through mirrors, lighting, gels and glass. The photogram looked nothing like the wild work of hers from the 1980s, a few examples of which are on view in the gallery's back room, even though all are made without use of any digital or darkroom trickery, and all are composed of triangular forms.

What struck me were two qualities that seemed to echo the combination of ED JR.'s video paintings and (f)utility projects' expandable scrims. First was the photogram's startlingly raw blueness, everywhere that light had connected with photosensitive paper some 25 years prior. Second was the grid of white lines that emerged in all the places where it hadn't, where one or more layers of wire mesh had interrupted a beam to varying degrees of intensity and moire effect.

The convergence did not stop there. That evening I attended the opening of the Bruce Nauman show at Donald Young Gallery. Nauman has spent an illustrious career trying to figure out what to do in the studio, now that everything has been done. His latest work is no exception. "Combinations Described"

uses video and drawing to enumerate all the possible ways of holding up the fingers on each hand. With Nauman's voice droning on in the background, "Right hand, second finger, thumb," I walked into the gallery's back room, where the assistant director sits and the best work is sometimes sneakily placed.

There, inexplicably, hovered a 2005 photogram by James Welling. The form of a female torso rose suggestively from the curves of a wavy piece of mesh, which Welling had laid just so on photosensitive paper before exposing it to light. Darker than the indigo of ED JR.'s translucent ink, darker than the pure cyan of Kasten's blueprint, "Torso 9" looked as if it had plunged into the depths of the sea, where only the barest shimmer of light could penetrate, just enough to make out its floating voluptuousness.

Being a photogram, of course, the truth was the very opposite. The more transparent the material, the more brightness that gets through, the shadowier the result. Since the early 1980s, Welling's pictures have often manifested this kind of honest craftiness, using simple props like aluminum foil and plastic tiles to create strikingly abstract images. "Torso 9" was no exception, save that it proceeded in exactly opposite fashion, from plain material to subtle human form.

Three artworks seen in a single day, all colored blue and white, all comprised of straight lines and the spaces between, all revealed through light projected on screens – a beguiling convergence, certainly, but ultimately just a meaningless alignment, or more?

Resonance reveals, it doesn't conceal. Artworks, people, objects and texts align intentionally and not. It isn't coincidence itself that means a thing, but the meetings, the interactions, the kinships, associations, rhymes and sympathies.

One blue line combines with another, and the world is animated.