

# Scott Wolniak

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Teaching	Contact	Suitable Archive

## Bridge Magazine, Ginger Wolfe

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Cryptically titled *New Ghosts*, this show of five works historicized bygone eras in a gestural sweep that seemed conversely hopeful about social regeneration. On the whole, the show presented a thoughtful and timely deliberation on current social situations involving the emerging cultural unknown, hence the title's ambiguity. Although each piece was laced with social motivations, the work avoided being what is generally termed "activist." Rather, Wolniak's works materialized more as cultural observations or comments than as postulated answers.

The most overtly political work, *Blow Up*, was the first piece to confront viewers outside the building. A pattern suggesting traditional Islamic decoration stretched across the gallery's large storefront windows, creating an intricate image whose ephemerality nonetheless avoided dominating the gallery. Made of black paper cut outs, the piece appeared at first to be a formal pattern, but actually presented horrific, abstracted images of bombings and explosions. It succeeded in providing a sort of filter or screen between the exterior and interior spaces, visually filtering out the reality of either space for the occupants of the other. Though admittedly somewhat obscure, this strategy nonetheless attractively acknowledge the category of attitude or reflection.

Also on view was a well executed drawing of a large tie-dye pattern

(taken directly from tie-dyed fabric), which presented a sort of visual convolution alongside a historic nod to art of the optical illusion. Despite the inevitable cultural associates of the tie-dye, this piece was considerably more successful than other Rorschach-like drawings or paintings, which in any case did not claim to be. By thus negating the Rorschach association, it retained an ability to remark on the departed era of tie-dyed-stoners-which could in turn indicate a further intellectualizing of a previous, perhaps naive call for social change. However, this work unfortunately created some conceptual confusion through its aesthetic similarities with the contextually distinct *Blow Up*.

The strongest piece in the sparse, reflective space was a large fountain on the central floor titled *Cycling Pong* literally a play on words. Fabricated from recycled materials, the work included two revolving water spouts made of manipulated cups that regurgitated a slow, circular stream of water. The fountain's spatial presence and integrity were reminiscent of its counterparts assimilated into the outside public domain, exemplifying the way this particular artist is able to appropriate, manipulate, rework, and transpose common cultural ideas and other found language.

Nearby, a video titled *Against Nature* also included cycling, bicycling specifically. Both linguistically and in terms of a similar intellectualizing of subculture, *Against Nature* and *Cycling Pond* lend themselves to comparisons with the work of Rodney Graham, whose retrospective was on view concurrently in Milwaukee. Wolniak shot *Against Nature* as he bicycled through Chicago neighborhoods, and set the footage to a Stereolab song with the lyrics, "My Dearest Friend / Don't go to war / Don't choose to go / You will not win down the cursed path / This is the

future of an illusion / Aggressive culture of despotism." The music offered both timely appeal and a subtitle tribute to Stereolab member Mary Hanson, who died in a bicycle accident. The song's visceral, layered harmonies provided a fitting platform for the forward and backward linearity of the bicycle's movement, in turn indicative of the broader progression and regression that exists in a diminishing historical timeline.

*Ginger Wolfe is a Chicago-based artist and art writer, and editor of Interreview.*

[Back to press](#)