



**PORTLAND**  
**MSHR: "Liquid Hand"**  
**at Upfor Gallery**

Upfor Gallery debuted in September 2013 with a mission to showcase new media in ways not often seen in commercial galleries in the Northwest. The playful interactive installation, "Liquid Hand," exemplified this focus via the creative synergy of Brenna Murphy and Birch Cooper, a collaborative duo billing themselves as MSHR. The installation was the second iteration of a previous solo show by Murphy. That show posited an abstracted miniature landscape made of wooden and 3D-printed paper components fastidiously laid out in a rectilinear schema. For "Liquid Hand," Murphy and Cooper joined forces to reconfigure and expand the exhibition with an eye toward viewer participation. On each side of the installation's perimeter they positioned touch-sensitive control panels beneath intricate, laser-cut screens, whose stepwise geometric patterns evoked Navajo and Hopi decorative motifs. When viewers touched the panels, amplifiers unleashed torrents of high-pitched tones, buzzes, and static. Two of the four control stations offered viewers an additional plaything: a set of shiny black rubber gloves, each appointed with sensors on the index and middle fingers. Donning these and touching the panels produced even shriller sonic distortions and set off LED strobes and green- and red-hued tungsten bulbs. The remainder of the mise-en-scène consisted of precisely placed shells, sand, and driftwood; sculptures made of plastic resin, some standing on leg-like armatures that made them resemble lizards or insects; and freestanding totemic structures whose loopy, calligraphic contours recalled Sanskrit characters.

What this bevy of bizarre visuals and sounds added up to was anybody's guess. In press materials, the artists played their conceptual card fast and loose, proffering colorfully vague references to an "angel portal, paranoid bug, hyperdimensional terraform," and "mushroom spirit human replicator." Ultimately, however, in the face of such a blinking, shrieking, multi-media glut, a rigorous and communicable thematic grounding seemed beside the point. The media themselves, to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, suggested their own message. In this era of online gaming, smart phones, and tablets, MSHR's interactive objects, so full of sound and fury, signified something: the mesmeric allure of the buzzing boxes to which we have grown so indelibly fastened.

—RICHARD SPEER

"LIQUID HAND" (DETAIL), 2013, **MSHR**  
 AUDIO EQUIPMENT, LIGHTS, DIGITAL PRINTS,  
 MECHANICALLY-PRODUCED SCULPTURE,  
 CARVED DRIFTWOOD, SEASHELLS, SAND, AND MIRRORS  
 APPROXIMATELY 14' x 14½' x 3½'  
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF UPFOR GALLERY