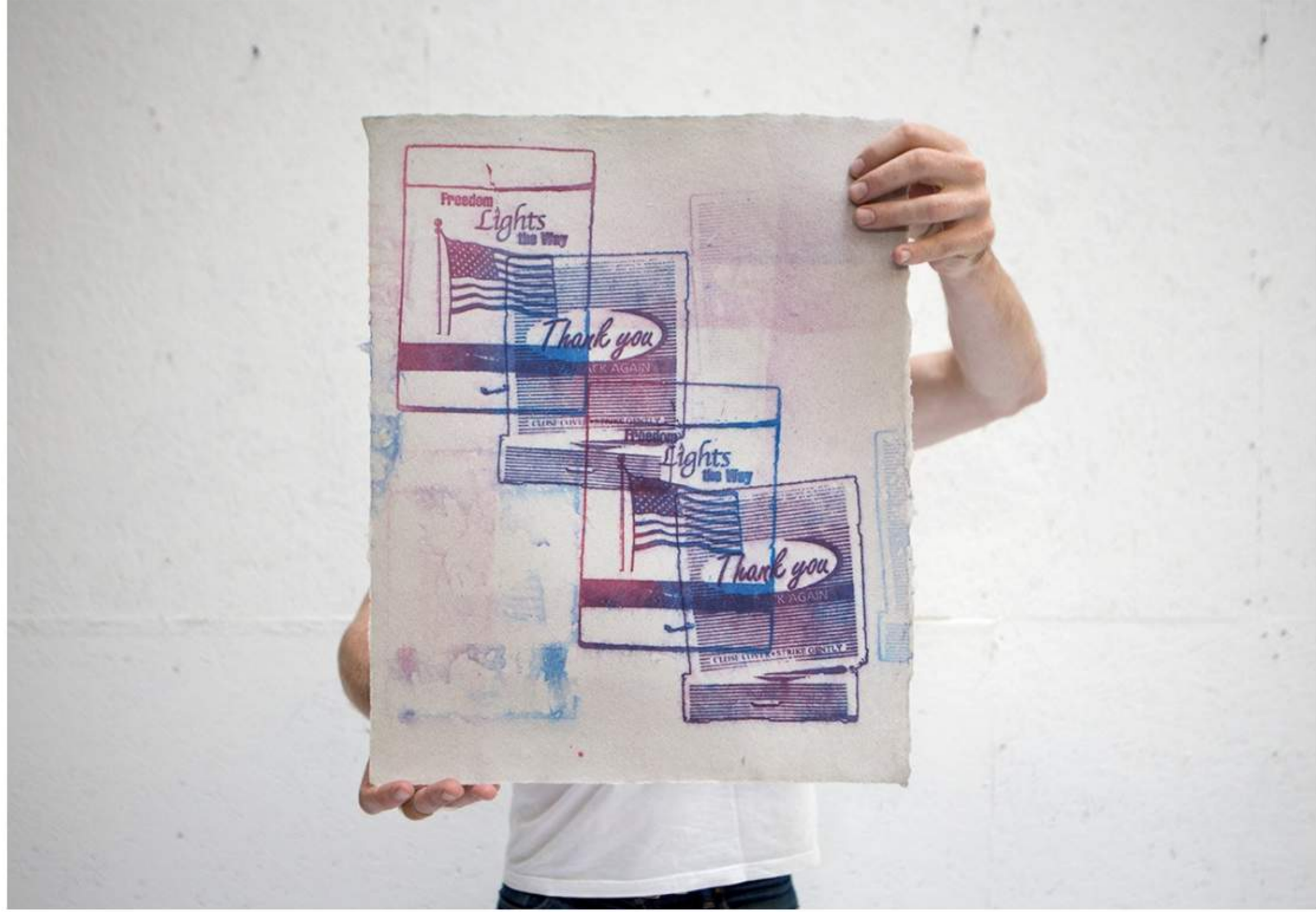




Converge 45 Might Be The Arts Festival Portland Needs

Converge's second iteration starts this week with a mix of performance art, large-scale installations and gallery shows from local and national artists.



By Shannon Gormley | Published August 9 • Updated August 15

For a growing art scene, festivals are essential. A well-curated arts festival can give a city the kind of national recognition that encourages innovation on a local level. But festivals that are too locally focused often miss the opportunity to connect artists with larger markets, while a festival that's too ambitious can mean forsaking a wieldable vision at the expense of the attendee and the resources available to the artists.

Converge 45 strikes the right balance. Founded last year by influential Portland gallery owner and art dealer Elizabeth Leach, it's again curated by another key figure in the Portland art scene, Kristy Edmunds, who founded PICA and TBA. Converge's second iteration starts this week with a mix of performance art, large-scale installations and gallery shows from local and national artists. It's ambitious programming full of complex multimedia work.

But what makes Converge seem so promising isn't so much its bounds as its limits—it still seems intimate. It's a relatively small lineup, consisting of only 25 artists spread over a manageable eight venues (including Jennifer Steinkamp's exhibit at the Portland Art Museum). Most shows are free to the public. Many of those artists have been collaborating with Edmunds since last year's festival.

In a way, the ideal arts festival requires thinking big and small at the same time. Here are the four works in this year's Converge that seem most likely to do just that. See the full schedule on converge45.org.

Combat Paper

Since 2009, Vermont-based artist Drew Cameron has been providing emotional support for veterans in an unexpected way. In *Combat Paper*, veterans are invited to cut up their old military uniforms and churn them through a Hollander beater, which transforms the scraps of cloth into paper. It's a therapeutic ritual that's deeply poetic. The works veterans have created on their uniform paper have been on display in the Portland Art Museum since June, but there'll be a pop-up papermaking workshop as part of Converge. *Portland Art Museum Evan's Lower Court, 1219 SW Park Ave. 8-10 pm Wednesday, August 9.*

Choreography for Reading Aloud and Nothing Is Natural

On Friday, Reed's campus will be overrun with performance art. In the library, artists in *Choreography for Reading Aloud*, by Portlander MK Guth, will devise an abstract performance piece based on books they find onsite. Around the spring that runs through the campus, three artist collectives (R.I.S.E., Winter Count and Postcommodity) will unite for a call-and-response performance titled *Nothing Is Natural*. There'll be art exhibits relating to the performances' pieces displayed on the campuses until October 1, but the morning of the performances offers something that all good arts festivals should: something that's both ephemeral and strange. *Reed College, 3203 SE Woodstock Blvd. 11 am Friday, August 11.*

Drift Iteration Paths

With a complicated combination of mediums, Birch Cooper and Brenna Murphy create work that seems almost formless. Both artists had recent solo shows at Upfor gallery in which they displayed colorful, intricate 3D printed forms. As MSHR, they combine their eye for detail and whimsical sense of form. For Converge, they're installing a weird machine that shoots lasers, makes strange gurgling noises and resembles a giant, ornate circuit. *PSU Littman Gallery, 1825 SW Broadway. Through August 13.*

This Is a Black Spatial Imaginary

Portland artist Sharita Towne can do just about anything. She's a videographer and a print maker, and just about everything she does is radiant with a complicated yet hopeful sense of beauty. For Converge, Towne, along with collaborating artists, will perform a new piece titled *This Is a Black Spatial Imaginary*. Towne's work often deals with issues like gentrification, and this particular piece is intended as a public intervention. Performed by the Broadway Bridge at night, it will almost certainly be one of the festival's most special moments. *The east side of the Broadway Bridge. 9:30 pm, Thursday, August 10.*

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About Shannon Gormley
Shannon Gormley is originally from Baltimore, Maryland. She covers local and non-local music in Portland, and writes for Baltimore City Paper whenever she's visiting her hometown.

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