

Claude VAN LINGEN in 2009



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By [Michael Barnes](#) | Monday, May 18, 2009, 11:01 AM

Serious people are always dubious about how socializing can lead to serious good. Like art. Why not cut the cheap-wine openings and just show the art, expecting the audience, one by one, to get it on their own?

Here's a counter-example: I met **Claude van Lingen** ever so briefly on a frosty night at Co-Lab on Allen Street in East Austin. The grimacing man with the unplaceable accent and short, white beard appeared like something out of Conrad or Melville.

His novelistic visage stuck in my memory. Also Co-Lab's **Sean Gaulager**'s whispered endorsement: "He's good, very good."

Last week I spotted van Lingen at the W Hotel & Residences art preview, approached him respectfully then chatted up the South African-born artist and his sociable grandson.

Through Facebook and other means, I discovered that van Lingen was producing a multi-media show at Co-Lab a few days later. I missed the big social night, but arranged to see the exhibit, "1,000 Years from Now," on Sunday.

Wow. The work - three parts of which were on display - has developed over 30 years, as van Lingen attempts to refract today's issues and personalities for an imagined future consumption. It's a thorny series that has already won praise in New York, Johannesburg, S.A. and elsewhere.

One element involved dark paper upon which the artist had signed with various writing implements the names of thousands of soldier killed in Iraq. As he wore down the paper inscribing name over

each previous name, he continued the writing on a subsequent under layer, which left the whole double-arms-length-wide aggregation ripped like a gaping wound.

A second part arranged neatly the printed names of those soldiers. At Saturday's event, he invited guests to find names similar to theirs and to sign them in layers on the wall.

The most complicated part was a copse of long, thin, suspended planes. Some were blank, others were covered with mirrors, while still others were plastered with images from printed and televised media.

Over this, van Lingen projected cable news programs (in his conception, they should have been live shows, but Co-Lab doesn't get cable). The effect was slightly startling and very sophisticated. I mulled it over as I walked the four miles back to the newsroom.

You see, socializing can lead one to quite serious art about quite serious issues.

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