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WHO WE ARE

The Pacific Sentinel magazine offers an inclusive forum incorporating in-depth content from the PSU community. We advocate on behalf of the marginalized, explore the merits of cultural artifacts, and initiate interdisciplinary communication.

Cover photo by Amelia Klein
LVL UP: Up & Coming Band is Taking Things to the Next Level

by Tess Beschel

LVL UP photo taken by Tess Beschel
“So what do you guys do to prepare for a set?”

“Stretch,” Nick Corbo said as he pulled his arms over his head, and swayed side to side.

“Yeah, I stretch,” Greg Rutkin chimed in, “I also apply my Tiger Balm. Mike hates the smell but I kinda like it, and so does everyone else.”

“It smells so bad,” said Mike Caridi.

We were upstairs behind the balcony of Mississippi Studios, standing around a circular table. It was 7 pm—an hour before the first of three openers.

“Sometimes I drink a Red Bull,” Dave Benton said, which gave Corbo the idea to go get himself a vodka Red Bull.

Almost exactly three hours later, the band took the stage under indigo lights and six mounted bass drums. The room was packed, and the balcony was full. As soon as they struck the first chord, the crowd erupted and began singing in unison with Benton, “One more day, we’ll make some money, honey” — the hook to one of the group’s most popular tracks, “Annie’s a Witch,” off their sophomore album, “Hoodwink’d.” Rutkin’s impeccable timing on the drums created an infectious beat that warranted vigorous head-nodding; Corbo’s bass work vibrated through the massive amplifiers intoxicating the crowd with the nuances that his unique ham-fisted style offers; and Benton and Caridi’s guitar solos were a blatant depiction of their talent. The crowd bounced and crooned to each song, infatuated with the alternating setlist between the three songwriters and vocalists of the band: Dave, Mike, and Nick.

“We all have kind of our own vibe.” Corbo said.

“Mike has a much more straight rock feel, Nick has a behind the beat kind of thing going on for most of his songs, and I think Dave is usually writing things that are a little funkier, in an untraditional sort of way,” Rutkin added.

About six years ago, amidst the abundant creative talent incubated at the university known as SUNY Purchase in New York City, Benton, Corbo, Caridi, and Rutkin found each other and struck gold. They were among a community of artists with similar aspirations who lived together, worked together, and played together in various DIY show spaces. Caridi, Benton, and Corbo released their first album, “Space Brothers” in 2011, initially intending it to be a split tape for their solo projects, but later deciding to release it as an album under one name—LVL Up.

“[We] feel like ‘Space Brothers’ was our least collaborative album. There were more instances in that record of us making recordings as individuals and then just putting them all into something that felt a little more like a playlist,” the band said in a joint statement. Although the songwriting was often done separately, something about the sound and subject matter of the songs came together relatively cohesively.

Shortly before their first show as a band, Rutkin joined the mix, and in September of 2014, they released “Hoodwink’d,” on the independent record label Double Double Whammy, that was founded by Caridi and Benton. “Hoodwink’d” was a fifteen-track lo-fi/power pop record that featured some of the group’s most interesting songwriting and musicianship to date. Sonically, the record was a buzzy revival of the 90’s rock era, with a sort of vocal reclusiveness that is a trademark of their unique sound. Thematically, they addressed similar topics to their first album of interpersonal conflict, but the record exhibits a recurring theme of looking at these conflicts through the guise of a supernatural motif, using witchcraft, hexes, and casting spells as a sort of spiritual scapegoat for the very real problems that come along with being in your early twenties. The band has referred to this album in past interviews as their first real full-length album release. The reaction to this album was dynamic, and put the spotlight on them in the underground Brooklyn music scene.

In 2015, LVL Up toured with the band The Sidekicks, and caught the ear of Nick Duncan, a radio and college promotion representative from Seattle label SubPop.

“I think I listened to [Hoodwink’d] hundreds of times. For a while it was all I was listening to. I got obsessed with that record,” Duncan said. He spent the next few months giving the band’s music to SubPop’s Artists and Repertoire department and when the band made it over to the West Coast, he brought the general manager to their show in Seattle. After that set, SubPop made the decision to offer the group a contract.

“They stared at the center of this explosive Brooklyn music scene so when they played, they were in a room full of people who knew the band and knew the record, everyone in the venue was singing to every song. Everyone was
excited by the set, and as much as they played great, the response from the crowd was great, and I think that won everybody [at the label] over,” Duncan said.

The band had been waiting for an opportunity like this—SubPop was on their list of dream labels they would want to have a contract with and, in their words, “We were feeling a little loss of steam, a little exhausted from releasing our own records.” Naturally, they had a bit of nerves before the Seattle gig. “Our set was late so there was a lot of suspense and lead up time to get the jitters,” Benton said. “After [the show] we felt we gave it our best and we were really happy.”

“It was one of the best shows we ever played,” Corbo added. The rest of the guys concurred.

In early 2016, the band signed with SubPop and began the production of their third album, “Return to Love.” Duncan explained what stood out to him most about the band: “The songwriting in general is super strong. On paper, it’s a band with three guys, who all have their own voice, that don’t really write together, but are writing songs for the same band. That could be a mess, yet everything they’ve put out has felt really cohesive. When three young guys just out of college can do that, they’re onto something really special.”

“I think having three songwriters takes some pressure off us as individuals. It also creates an interesting writing environment where we’re encouraged to bounce ideas off of one another, and share certain ideas or themes in an attempt to make a cohesive product. The cohesion then becomes something you’re actively trying for, rather than a byproduct of a sole individual writer,” Benton said, “We’ve been completing somewhere between 75 to 100 percent of the song before bringing it to the group, and most of the collaboration happens while making the final recording. We’ve been talking about trying to be more collaborative in the writing process for our new songs though.”

“We’ve been trying to write a new song during every sound check,” Corbo said, “Only for like five minutes, but still.”

“Return to Love,” their SubPop debut, was released in September of 2016, and was the most developed, cohesive, and thematically complex project the band had ever released.

“They were very purposeful about making a record that points in a singular direction,” said Duncan. “With Return to Love, there are a handful of songs that are directly a narrative and tie together, but [also], in general it feels like they’re emotionally all tied together. I think that’s something that they took care to do on this record. They didn’t want to make another record that was just a bunch of songs—they wanted to make one single record.”

Recording with SubPop afforded them the resources to experiment more with new sounds and instruments, and after transitioning from college to the real world, they reached a new maturity level, ready to explore more sophisticated subject matters.

“Part of that is you’re not twenty and in college anymore, all of a sudden it’s like, ‘this is the real world, you gotta deal with grown-up problems, and not just the emotional shit,’” Duncan said. The band explains in a joint statement, “There was a certain development in subject matter that can be attributed mostly to age and perspective, or maybe just a shift in a focus of interest.” In “Return to Love,” the occult theme from “Hoodwink’d” is exchanged with a more theological feel, with the opening track, “Hidden Driver,” ringing out with the chorus: “God is peeking, softly speaking, breaking everything.”

“Return to Love” is a turning point in the band’s career. “We have some older fans now. More of a mixed crowd of older and younger people, which is refreshing.” Corbo said. They were also finally able to book their first European tour with the financial support of SubPop. “Releasing ‘Return to Love’ has been a really positive thing for us as a band,” they said, “we’ve grown a lot in the few months since it’s been released.”
For The Glory of Mankind

Nier: Automata Review

by Jeremy King

“Nier: Automata,” a Japanese action role-playing game developed by Platinum Games and released March 7, 2017 on the Playstation 4 and March 17th on PC, deftly combines fluid, invigorating gameplay with an emotional and often surprising narrative.

A sequel to the original “Nier,” released in 2010 for the Playstation 3 and Xbox 360, “Automata” is set in the year 11945, placing it thousands of years ahead of the original game. This leap into the future ensures that the plot is self-contained enough to remain accessible to gamers unfamiliar with its predecessor, though fans of the original game will be pleased to find connections scattered throughout.

Following an alien invasion thousands of years prior to the events of the game, the remnants of humanity -- defeated by the aliens’ machine army -- relocated to a base on the moon to ensure their survival and facilitated YoRHa, an organization of androids dedicated to reclaiming Earth and eradicating the machine lifeforms. To this end, specialized units are sent from The Bunker, YoRHa’s orbiting base of operations, down to Earth’s surface to conduct various missions on behalf of the organization’s commander and the human overseers.

The game begins during the 14th machine war and is primarily centered around the perspective of 2B, a female battle android, and 9S, a ‘scanner’ type who specializes in the retrieval and analysis of information. Tasked with assisting an Android resistance group located on the planet’s surface, 2B and 9S must grapple with the...
ramifications of the increasingly bizarre behavior displayed by the machine lifeforms.

To give away any additional plot points would be to diminish the impact of “Automata’s” storytelling. The game veers into unexpected and often fascinating thematic territory throughout; a feat made all the more impressive given the relative slow burn of the narrative. This is not a game designed to be easily digested. While it’s possible to ‘finish’ the game within the span of 15-20 hours, players will need to invest closer to 40-50 to unveil the whole picture.

The larger framework of the story is rich and compelling in its nuance and attention to detail, albeit unconventionally structured. There’s no way to glean the full breadth of the plot within the first playthrough, as “Automata” features no less than 26 possible endings. Five of these endings are canonical, while the remaining 21 are context-sensitive easter eggs. Eat a mackerel, for instance, and you may find yourself watching the credits roll by far earlier than anticipated.

Fortunately, “Automata” lends itself well to repeated playthroughs. Rather than force the player to retread the same exact story from the same perspective, starting up a second playthrough quickly reveals that this fragmented storytelling method is much more than a cheap gimmick thrown in to artificially extend playtime. It’s a technique that the developers utilize deftly to explore alternate character perspectives, gradually peeling back layer after layer of hidden truths, motivations, and emotional depth that not only fleshes out the latter playthroughs, but also gives a much greater sense of weight to easily overlooked plot details within the first.

It’s interesting, well-executed, and gratifyingly deliberate in its pacing, though it likely won’t be everyone’s cup of tea. Those who played the first “Nier” or who are familiar with game director Yoko Taro’s body of work may not be surprised to find that “Automata,” like its prequel—and the “Drakengard” series that spawned it—requires repeat playthroughs to unlock the “true” ending. Those familiar with “Taro,” “Nier,” or “Drakengard” may also not be surprised to discover that this is a very emotionally heavy game that at times seems to revel in delight as it gut-punches the player’s feelings into submission, often doing so in satisfyingly unexpected ways that make use of conventions within the videogame medium itself as interesting plot devices. Never before have I cried and bemoaned the cruelty of the universe while staring at an item inventory menu like I did at a specific point in
“Automata’s” third playthrough.

Beyond the scope of the story lies a thoroughly enjoyable, polished action RPG experience that makes playing through its sometimes soul-crushing narrative consistently enjoyable and engaging. Combat is engaging and intuitive, easily standing out as one of the highlights of gameplay. Given the amount of enemies thrown in the player’s direction, this is a very, very good thing. While there were a few moments throughout my roughly 50-hour playtime that I found myself tired of fighting off waves of enemies, most notably in the final arc of the plot, this only ever seemed to occur after I’d spent hour after hour playing the game in a single sitting and speaks more to the strength of the game’s story keeping me glued to the screen than anything else. Many of the game’s larger battles stand out as exceptional, easily providing some of the most

memorable and awe-inducing gaming experiences I’ve encountered in years.

The searingly beautiful and seamlessly adaptive and dynamic soundtrack not only adds to the experience, but frequently brings already fantastic moments of gameplay to a whole new level. It’s difficult to write about the music of “Automata” without gushing. Suffice to say, the score is absolutely outstanding and used to great effect throughout.

While the sound of “Automata” is as good as it gets, other areas of presentation are not without their hiccups. From a visual standpoint, despite featuring a slew of pleasing aesthetic choices in character, enemy, and world design, the game isn’t going to be taking home any awards for visual fidelity. It’s by no means a bad looking game at its core, but the game features more than its fair share of ugly low-resolution textures and jagged edges, to name two of its

most obvious graphical shortcomings.

And while navigation throughout the semi-open world is a breeze, it’s worth noting that this is one area that doesn’t stack up to the rest of the title’s charms over time. Despite the varied locations and interesting design aesthetics of the different explorable ‘zones’—some of which are indeed quite beautiful—“Automata’s” world, while giving off an initial impression of open-ended, large-scale exploration, seems to grow smaller and smaller with each playthrough. Repeated visits and backtracking across the same areas, particularly late into the game, inevitably feels repetitive.

Given the structure of the game’s story, however, the smaller scale of these areas does strike a decent balance in the gameplay department. While I felt compelled to explore each zone more thoroughly and take on various side quests in my first playthrough, I was able to run through the second and third more efficiently and in less overall time. The available side quests, however, necessitate a fair amount of backtracking and don’t tend to offer any compelling new gameplay encounters or forays into exciting new territory. This isn’t to say that the side quests themselves are without merit in terms of storytelling or rewards, but rather, hopping back and forth again and again between a handful of locations is simply bound to get boring after a point.

At the end of the day, the game’s pros vastly outweigh the cons. This is a unique gaming experience that features exceptional gameplay and a fantastic, emotional story. “Automata” is a gripping, beautiful game unlike just about anything else out there.
At a recent town hall forum, Portland State University (PSU) representatives presented a budget for Fiscal Year 2017. The meeting carried a cautious air, however, as the budget revealed a significant shortfall. The budget includes a 5 percent tuition increase for all undergraduate students, but that alone will not cover the shortfall.

PSU is joining other public Oregon universities to petition the state for a funding increase of 100 million dollars in the Public University Support Fund (PSUF). The PSUF represents the bulk of the state’s investment in public education, and is currently at 665 million, according to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

Currently, Oregon’s funding for public universities is at a relative low. According to a study by the Urban Institute, funding dropped by 51 percent between 2000 and 2014. While funding has been recovering with regular increases, it remains significantly below pre-recession levels. PSU has projected that this increase in funding, along with a tuition increase, will be necessary to cover the budget shortfall without
requiring cuts across the board.

PSU President Wim Wiewel’s request for audience members to contact legislators in support of the funding increase, however, highlighted fears underscoring this budget. The budget committee revealed that, if they are unable to reach their goal of $100 million in additional funding, covering the budget shortfall will require cuts to spending and potentially increasing tuition 9 percent for undergraduate residents. The budget committee has planned out scenarios for each level of funding. In each scenario where the universities receive less than $100 million, budget cuts are guaranteed.

According to president Wiewel, cuts would be applied “across the board,” with specifics being delegated to the department level. “That is the right way to do it,” Wiewel said, “those people in the action have the best sense where the cut will do the least damage.”

While the administration remains cautiously hopeful that the state will step up funding, the danger of budget cuts has analysts looking at the underlying causes. During the presentation, PSU representatives called attention to the Public Employee Retirement System (PERS), a statewide policy governing the retirement benefits of government employees.

The policy includes the employees of public universities, such as PSU. According to the budget committee, maintaining PERS benefits accounts for 20 percent of the university’s budget, and is expected to rise to as much as 30 percent in the coming years. As a benefit guaranteed by the legislature, PSU has no power over the budget impact of PERS.

The economics behind PERS current impact are complex, but can be traced largely to two factors. First, the majority of PERS funding comes from investing income. In the nineties, when the economy was booming, PERS could meet budget goals handily and was lauded as a successful system. Since the recession, however, that investment income dropped considerably, leaving a shortfall that the state budget is legally obligated to cover.

Second, the retirement age population has risen considerably over the past few decade as baby boomers enter retirement. In a December 2012 report, Oregon’s Office of Economic Analysis projected that the elderly population will grow by 48 percent from 2010 to 2020. As the percentage of retirees increases relative to the general population, PERS may face record number payouts with a lower pool of individual contributors.

Because PERS benefits are based on salary, it has led to some notable payouts for high-earning public employees. The highest of these payouts goes to Dr. Johnny Delashaw, a former OHSU neurosurgeon. Dr. Delashaw draws a pension of $55,280 a month, according to recent reporting by The Oregonian.

While Dr. Delashaw’s pension is significantly higher than the average monthly benefit of $2,476, it is indicative of a highly paid wave of retirees. According to a 2016 report by the Register-Guard, the number of PERS pensions over $100,000 per year has risen from 837 in 2011 to 1,585 in 2016.

While PSU hopes to resolve its current budget crisis with assistance from the legislature, the growth of PERS is a looming threat and a sign of sharp generational divide. The cost of a college education has grown massively since the era of current retirees, and supporting that generation is now further taxing the current generation of students. Moving forward, Oregon will need to face that an affordable future for students and the funding retirement for baby boomers may not both be sustainable.
“Art of the Brick” has been heralded by CNN as one of the world’s “must see exhibitions”. Admittedly, this seems to be a bit ostentatious—how impressive can a series of LEGO models really be? If a series of plastic bricks strategically stuck together can evoke sorrow, laughter, admiration, and a deep reflection of the mysteries of life, then the “Art of the Brick” is a massively impressive collection that is impossible to step away from uninspired. The moment they step inside, the viewer immediately develops a personal connection to this exhibit by watching a short video of Nathan Sawaya explaining his art. Sawaya says that he always loved LEGOs growing up and even brought them to college with him at NYU, where he studied art. After his undergrad, he went on to law school. Nathan never lost his passion for building with LEGOs or art, however, and after working all day in a boardroom, he found his creative outlet by building LEGO sculptures. What started as a hobby became a full-time job as he began to receive commissions from around the world. As the video ends, Sawaya talks about his inspiration; he ends with the words “Art is necessary. Art can be anything. It all starts with one brick”. After this presentation, the audience migrates to the next section. It is clear that Sawaya’s NYU art
education has not gone to waste. On two opposing corners of the walls are LEGO “reliefs” that are placed side-by-side that are depictions of famous artworks, from the Lascaux Cave Paintings to Klee’s “New Harmony.” Each piece was complemented by a description of the historical value of the art it was modeled after and a statement from Sawaya about the choices he made to recreate the work. In a replica of the Symbol of St. John from “The Book of Dimma,” Sawaya imitates the look of the woven borders by placing LEGOS on top of each other, resulting in depth rather than a flat surface. In contrast, Sawaya’s version of Muqī’s “Lotus and Swallow,” conveys balance and tranquility, is a perfectly smooth surface. As the viewer continues through this section, they notice other creative versions of paintings, sculptures, and even a stained glass window. Sawaya embraces a global appreciation of art history, featuring pieces from around the world, from Chile, to Korea, to Egypt, and Nigeria. This is a departure from the emphasis of the West found in many overviews of art history.

In the following exhibits, Sawaya demonstrates a fine synthesis of technical skill and emotional expression. He makes a tactful transition from his homage to fine art to his original contributions. From the Sculpture Garden, the viewer enters the section “Metamorphosis.” Here there is an immediate and obvious mood shift highlighted by the lighting and the content. Soft blue lights glide in swirls across the floor and accentuate the centerpiece, “Swimmer,” featuring a figure immersed in a pile of blue LEGOs that imitate the effects of water astonishingly well for an angular medium. Other pieces in this section include a self-portrait and a depiction of the artist’s worst nightmare. From here, the content transitions from the personal to a more general series of expression, including sections titled: “The Human Condition”, “Through the Darkness”, and “The Artist’s Studio.” This series encompasses almost every human experience and emotion that range from joy, celebration, growth, humor, creativity and love to more darker themes such as anger, fear, isolation, shame, and death. Throughout these sections, Sawaya pushes the accessibility in his medium. These artworks are powerful and relatable, it’s easy to forget that they are made out of a plastic children’s toy. The last two sections show that while Sawaya has mastered his craft, he is still experimenting and exploring the medium. The section “In Pieces” features a collaboration of Sawaya’s LEGO sculptures subtly imposed into photos that reference American minimalist postcards. This body of work is more conceptual and experimental. The LEGO sculptures created a pixelated effect in an otherwise sharp image that makes the viewer
have to look twice. Not only has Sawaya flirted with mixed
media, he has also used his LEGO masterpieces to create his
own street art, featured in the next section “Homecoming.” The
piece is called “Hugman,” a life-size human figure made from
multicolored blocks that Sawaya leaves around cities hugging
telephone poles, trees, fence posts, and even bicycle tires.
Hugman is meant to inspire the viewers to embrace others and
themselves.
The real magic happens at the end of the exhibit, in the Brick
Lab. Here, dozens of people, young and old, are busy at long
tables making their own creations. On the walls are posters
with tips on how to make certain forms and shapes. There are
two shelves that showcase all of the art that previous visitors
have made. Standing in the Brick Lab, it becomes apparent just
how sensational Sawaya’s medium is. There is the feeling of the
hard plastic edges as little fingers manipulate them. There is the
clicking and snapping of all the bricks connecting, and finally
there are ideas that have been brought to life for everyone to
see. Sawaya has gone above and beyond to inspire thousands of
people to create and to play. This engagement and enthusiasm
that the exhibit generates in the hearts of dozens of children
and adults alike affirm that this exhibit is absolutely necessary to
experience in order to see how something as simple as a plastic
brick can be pushed to its emotional, technical, and historical
extremes.
The Bacchae

Presented by PSU School of Theater + Film

by Kimberlee Ponce
Director Richard Wattenberg describes the 21st century as “tumultuous times.” On March 11, Portland State University theater performed their last show of “The Bacchae,” a play that efficiently illustrates a myriad of surprisingly relatable parallels between Greek mythology and America’s modern political climate. Held in the evening at Lincoln Performance Hall, the set was well balanced between shades of orange and purple. Stage lights were also cast upon Greek doric columns. Brooding and mysterious cello chords played in the background. Until suddenly, a jolting clang shifted the audience’s attention to the beginning monologue.

“The Bacchae” tells the story of two competing cousins, Pentheus and Dionysus. Dionysus was born out of a human-God affair between Semele and Zeus. Zeus’s jealous wife, Hera, sought revenge against Semele and asked Zeus to appear in divine form—with full knowledge that Zeus would instead appear as a bolt of lightning from the sky, ultimately burning Semele to ashes. Despite his wife’s malicious plan, Zeus was still able to save his unborn son and stitched the baby into his thigh. The play is centered around Dionysus’s return to Thebes as a grown man, who masquerades as “The Stranger” in town. He then feverishly seeks revenge against Pentheus and his entire family for their poor treatment of Dionysus’s mother, Semele, and for prohibiting the kingdom to worship Dionysus.

Dionysus is played by student Skye McLaren Walton who portrays a very convincing dark God. Slender and tall, with a mischievous smile, Walton moved from all corners of the stage to keep the audience’s attention through the impressively long opening monologue. Walton thoroughly uses swift and seductive motion on stage that serves the shady side of Dionyus’s character well. His movement on stage was complimented by his costume choice: tall leather boots with lavishly fringed long-sleeves. A subtle “swish, swish” noise was heard with every step and turn.

Student Jewel Williams, also gave a convincing performance. William’s booming voice and stealthy physical stature evoked unmistakable self-efficacy. The actor created a prodigious and powerful portrayal of Cadmus, the founding King of Thebes. His body movement on stage was slow and calculated. The manner in which he spoke, was processed and methodical. His facial expressions, subtle and calm. He evoked a sense of infallibility even during the most climactic moments of the play, for example, when he reminds his daughter whose head is really in her hands.

The Asian Maenads, perhaps the most vibrant characters of the play, are the tragedy’s powerful female clan. Originally dragged from the city and into the forest, Dionysus’s made them his fearless allies in his revenge plot against Pentheus. Chorus Leaders played by students Olivia Gray, Paige Gregory, and Emily Hyde, sang and danced confidently in unison. The other Maenades (students Lauren Barmon, Cara Bryce, Harriet Cuttler, Emily Hill, Taryn Judah, Yu Murakami, and Danielle ZuZero) also gave a bright and breezy performance in twirly silk and chiffon dresses. Barefoot on stage, they danced together and flashed smiles that suggested a confident risqué energy. They had small white daisies that were just barely visibly in their long thick braids. A delicate look that complimented their dresses and intense eye makeup. The chorus girls, even when resting against the Greek doric columns, masterfully portrayed their ornery unpredictability. The maenads shared devious smiles with one another on stage; held a mischievous look in their eye, and were able to maintain a perpetual power pose that evoked zeal and confidence the entire play.

Director Wattenburg was inspired to choose “The Bacchae” because of the current political climate. “In such a context, art becomes a necessity—not only providing escape from the stressful turbulence around us but inspiring us with some sense of meaning underlying the discord,” Wattenburg said.

Major themes and motifs from the tragedy such as disguise, revenge, and irrational versus rational forces, reflect Dionysus’ quest to find an answer. “The Bacchae” reminds the audience that despite uncertainty, chaos, and incomprehensible events action without hubris is vital in order to avoid a real-life tragedy.
“When I need something like paint, I’ll go to Blick. But when I need something that has a voice of it’s own, that has a story that I can pull and tease out of it, I go to SCRAP,” said Maya Lishka, who is majoring in art practices at Portland State University.

**Scrap PDX**

Known for its oddball trinkets and low prices, SCRAP PDX has been an important piece of Portland’s landscape since 1988. Originally founded by a group of teachers, SCRAP started as a pile of leftover classroom materials on a table at A Teacher’s Space, a resource center for Portland Public School teachers. It wasn’t until 1999 that one innovative teacher named Joan Grimm, along with a handful of her peers, received a grant from the Department of Environmental Quality. This grant gave them the opportunity to open a small center for the community. Originally located in donated space from the Rebuilding Center in northwest Portland, SCRAP moved through a variety of locations before settling in its current expanded location at 1736 SW Alder Street. While unique, SCRAP PDX is hardly singular. It is the flagship of the SCRAP USA network that includes SCRAPs in Denton, TX, Arcata, CA, Traverse City, MI, New Orleans, LA, Kennewick, WA, and Baltimore MD. Even within Portland city limits, there are other places of “creative reuse”—where the addition of creativity to an already manufactured item gives it a new purpose.

**Rebuilding Center**

In a huge warehouse on Mississippi Avenue, used building and remodeling materials are available for affordable prices. Whether it’s a demolished building or just some light remodeling, the community is welcome to donate whatever can be reused to the Rebuilding Center. As long as it is still in good condition they accept everything from hardware to bathtubs, from windows to appliances, from tile to toilets. Danielle, a local woodworker and kayak maker, referred to it as "basically Home Depot...if everything at Home Depot was once used." It is a nonprofit, running only on donations and volunteers.

**Habitat for Humanity ReStore**

Habitat for Humanity ReStores are international, with three locations in the Portland area already and another opening soon. The ReStore accepts new and reclaimed building materials, furniture, and appliances in good working condition. Proceeds from what is sold goes to build more Habitat for Humanity houses.

**Art Design Portland (ADX)**

Calling itself a “collaborative makerspace and fabrication house,” ADX provides organizations and individuals a place to share tools and knowledge. They have a full metal shop, sewing machines, a space for jewelry fabrication, and much more. It is a place where many local artists center their work. Membership costs are $250 a month, but free memberships are available to those who volunteer within the organization. ADX is located at 417 Southeast 11th Avenue.

**Southeast Portland Tool Library**

From shovels and rakes to biscuit joiners and a steel press, every kind of tool can be found at the Southeast Portland Tool Library. There is only a one-time optional enrollment fee of $10 to $40 to help fund the purchase and maintenance of tools. Currently they boast 4,000 members, 1,200 tools, and about 8,000 loans each year. Once run out of the basement of a church, they are currently located at the corner of southeast 20th and Salmon.

“The city itself has morals,” said Danielle. “And one is you should reuse stuff. Don’t buy it new just for one use. You can share it.”
Spaces

Scrap PDX is on 1736 SW Alder St.
Art Design Portland is on 417 SE 11th Ave.
Habitat for Humanity Restore is on 10445 SE Cherry Blossom Dr.
Rebuilding Center is on 3625 N Mississippi Ave.
Southeast Portland Tool Library is on 1137 SE 20th Ave.
April 17 through May 3, Portland State University (PSU) students will be able to vote in the Associated Students of PSU (ASPSU) election. Beyond electing new student representatives, students can also vote on student measures including 15 Now at PSU.

15 Now at PSU proposes establishing a $15 minimum wage for all campus workers starting Fall 2017.

The measure—brought to life by the student group 15 Now at PSU—began as an appeal to the Board of Trustees with a student petition containing 3,000 signatures last June. “They ignored us,” said 15 Now at PSU lead organizer and PSU alumnus Jamie Partridge, “we decided to go with a student ballot initiative.”

On March 7, students with the PSU Student Union (PSUSU) and 15 Now PSU gathered for the Fight for 15 rally inside the Smith Memorial Student Union. The rally ended by handing the petition off to Candace Avalos, the coordinator of student government and Greek Life. The petition had around 15,000 signatures.

“I don’t know about you, but I really want a $15 minimum wage to combat the nine percent increase in tuition that’s going to be coming,” Michael Richardson, a PSU student and 15 Now member said. Tuition increases of up to nine percent for undergraduate students are predicted if Oregon legislatures don’t allocate an extra 100 million dollars to the budget that the Public University Support Fund is asking for.

If the measure were to pass, it would encourage the Board of Trustees—comprised of appointed community members who make fiduciary decisions at PSU—to “crop from the top” by curbing administrative salaries for those who earn more than $100,000 and using the extra money to pay all campus workers a minimum of $15 per hour.

“It’s totally unrealistic...that’s not how policy is made, and that’s not how you run an organization. We pay people in a competitive market. If you want people who are qualified you have to pay a competitive salary. We do it with faculty, we do it with everybody,” said PSU President Wim Wiewel during a press conference in February. Wiewel also said he hadn’t heard about the measure.

Wiewel added that PSU is gradually absorbing the costs of a $15 minimum wage as the state mandates. “If you had to do it all at once, you’d have to raise tuition an additional six percent, unless you come up with totally unrealistic proposals to get rid of everybody who makes more than ‘x’,” Wiewel said.

The cost of increasing the wage this coming fall would be roughly 3.5 million dollars per year, a number determined with the help of documents out of the Finance & Administration branch at PSU, according to Partridge.
“You’d probably have to give at least some level of raises to the people who are now making $15 an hour... it’s hard to have [supervisors] getting paid less than the people they supervise...The total cost ends up being probably closer to 5 or 6 million,” said Wiewel.

“[It’s] difficult to get information about the number of workers [at PSU], and how much they’re paid. And so, we had to do survey and anecdotal evidence and talking to union representatives and stuff to find that there are thousands of workers on the PSU campus. And that the average student worker makes around ten dollars an hour,” Partridge said.

Initial data from a survey of 66 campus workers—ranging from resident assistants to parking enforcement officers—conducted by 15 Now at PSU reveals that 66 percent of campus workers hold at least one other job in addition to their position on campus. Forty-four percent said that they had used the PSU food pantry, and almost 40 percent of respondents either qualified for or were already receiving public assistance.

Three quarters of all respondents also said that their rent was over $500 a month.

Persons who devote more than 30 percent of their income to rent are considered “cost-burdened,” according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Almost
half of Portland renters, according to the Oregonian, are cost-burdened.

The 15 Now at PSU movement was inspired by the larger 15 Now campaign, which was launched by Council Member Kshama Sawant of Seattle in 2014. The law passed, and by April of 2015, Seattle began raising its minimum wage. In 2017, most employees reached the $15 minimum wage, but it will be in effect across the board by 2021.

In 2016, a public policy professor out of University of Washington, Jacob Vigdor, conducted a city-funded study on the law. According to the Washington Post, he found that the law could have positive impacts for those who didn't risk losing hours during a wage increase. Those whose work-hours were reduced, in response to the increased cost of hiring and paying employees, could face a loss in income.

A three-tiered $15 dollar minimum wage was instituted in Portland in 2016. The metro-area will reach the minimum wage of $14.75 by 2020.

"Rent is going up double digits per year. It's too low and too slow. And, of course, they made it a three-tier increase... the rest of the valley [e.g Eugene, Salem] will only go up to $13.50 in seven years. The rural areas only to $12.50," Partridge said.

"It's clearly needed. And the housing crisis adds to the upsurge of engagement and interest and desperation. Whether that discourages people or encourages people, it's hard to tell. And certainly, if a defeat with the ballot measure would set the movement back," Partridge said.
“Gametime” by Steven Christian
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