

LEFT AND ABOVE COURTESY DAN STEINHILBER AND NUMARK GALLERY  
A zip-lock bag filled with dish soap and a bucket filled with blue soda, two pieces by local artist Dan Steinhilber.

# Steinhilber Clearly Propels 'Transparent'

By MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN  
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**M**ARK YOUR calendars. Washington artist Dan Steinhilber, a favorite of this critic, is scheduled to get his first solo museum show, from Sept. 24 to Jan. 6 in the lobby of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, a museum not generally known for spotlighting local talent. In the meantime, you can get a glimpse of his work at Numark Gallery, where the group show "Transparent" has rounded up five disparate contemporary artists, each of whose work exploits some quality of translucency to varying degrees and depths.

Steinhilber has worked with liquid-filled plastic food containers, balloons and other everyday materials in the past, and here teases out light's ability to transform—and be transformed by—that which it passes through. This is particularly true of a bubblewrap piece that hangs near the front of Numark Gallery (all Steinhilber's work is untitled). Although the sacs of the plastic packaging material have been injected with what looks like dirty water, the play of orange light on the wall behind it defies all expectation. While the object itself has a modest interest as an artifact, it is really little more than a prism, an object that intrigues not so much for what it is as for its role as a conduit for a subtle but startling light show.

Similarly, a zip-lock bag filled with orange dish soap seems less about form—though it does make for a pretty, pillowy shape, to be sure—than ideas. Glowing with a warm, gently perfumed

incandescence—a kind of over-the-counter Wolfgang Laib, if you will, evoking not only the German artist's piles of sprinkled pollen but his puddles of milk on marble—Steinhilber's simple reconfiguration of household objects has an appeal that derives as much from sculptural energy as from its conceptual underpinnings. Like a mosquito caught in a chunk of amber, it contains potent artistic DNA.

Nature, of course, is a recurrent theme in Steinhilber's highly allusive work, and a meandering installation created from a roll of paper towels (not the most "transparent" material in the world, but oh well) suggests not just flowers but other, less obvious (perhaps microscopic) patterns writ large.

The winner in this small sampling of Steinhilber's work is a white bucket filled

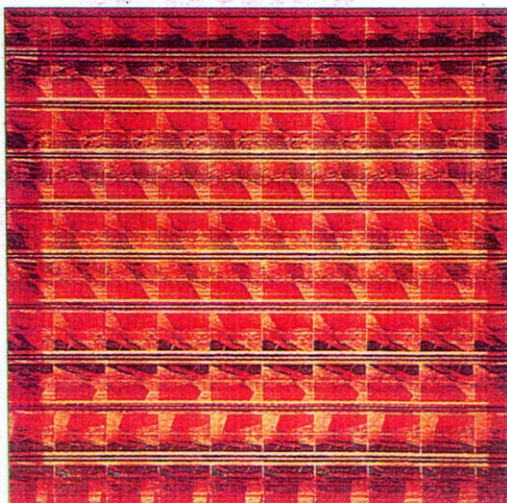
to the brim with dark blue soda sitting in the center of the room. As with much of the material he has worked with in the past (including toothpaste, inflated trash bags, etc.), the piece seems designed to change over time as the bubbles from carbonation dissipate and the wet blue droplets surrounding the rim dry out, leaving a sticky film. Rather than being seen as a flaw, however, this ephemerality is integral to the "meaning" underlying all of Steinhilber's art, which recalls not just the beauty of nature in her prime but the death and desiccation that are an inevitable part of the cycle of life.

Other standouts in "Transparent" include Carter Potter, who wraps motion picture film (or, more accurately, the lengths of blank leader attached to the beginning and end of a movie) around wooden stretcher bars like so many abstract paintings; and Terri Friedman, whose Morris Louis-like "veil" paintings in acrylic seem to float untethered to their Plexiglas substructures.

Speaking of substructure, the nature of transparency suggests that we're meant to ignore the transparent thing itself, concentrating instead on whatever lies on the other side—the opaque marbles inside Tony Feher's glass jars, for instance, that hang in the air like suspended dots of pointillist color (or giant pills), and the rosy bundles of attenuated yellow-green monofilament line that appear to thicken under Sharon Louden's clumps of hanging magnifying glasses, suggesting that space and scale are not fixed but shifting mental constructs.

This is obviously the case with some of the works in "Transparent." Steinhilber's bubblewrap, for instance, points away from itself and to the light it filters. More often, however, the only thing clear about the art in "Transparent" is that it is richly, provocatively ambiguous.

**TRANSPARENT** — Through Aug. 15 at Numark Gallery, 406 Seventh St. NW (Metro: Gallery Place-Chinatown). 202-628-3810. [www.numarkgallery.com](http://www.numarkgallery.com). Open Monday-Friday 11 to 6. Free.



COURTESY CARTER POTTER AND NUMARK GALLERY

Carter Potter's 2002 "Negative #8" wraps motion picture film around wooden stretcher bars.