

Lucent Lines
By Caroline Juler

Newport's municipal art gallery is relatively small in scale but that doesn't affect the scope of its shows. For its latest venture, Simon Fenoulhet has designed a site-specific light installation. Visitors will walk through the blacked out gallery and encounter colourful sensations that loom out of the dark. Simon Fenoulhet used to dissect furniture and rebuild it in wacky ways but for the past decade he has concentrated on transforming mundane objects by means of light. These objects have included teaspoons, table tennis balls and cocktail stirrers, things we would normally dismiss as disposables. His interventions ask us to reckon with them as abstract and environmental art.

One of his new pieces is an apparently freestanding light curtain which "glows out of the relative darkness of the surrounding space". The curtain is made from electro-luminescent wires encased in thousands of multi-coloured, plastic drinking straws. The light source is hidden and the "curtain hangs like a veil... The...straws... gently distort the hanging wires so, as the light pulses through [them], it echoes ripples on water or cloud movements. It's transparent, so that people on the other side can be seen moving across its surface. The straws glow like neon, their colours sing as they light up and then fade."

On his website Simon Fenoulhet says that he has rejected associations with natural forms but lacking other interpretations, many visitors will try to make those connections for themselves. Looking through the pages and video clips you realise that these smart, seemingly effortless and rather lyrical pieces take a lot of messy wiring to create. The show makes ironic as well as romantic points about the contradictions in western society but it also makes you ask – deliberately? - whether his means justify these particular ends.