'Gravity of Light' goes to church
Mount Adams plays host to exhibit of photos and sculpture

When you walk into the "Doug & Mike Starn: Gravity of Light" installation at the Holy Cross Church in Mount Adams, you're in for an "immersive experience," according to exhibit materials.

Identical twins born in New Jersey in 1961, the Starns have been art and design since almost from the time they graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1985. They have developed a studio practice combining skill in working with a wide variety of materials and tools, and have been widely exhibited internationally.

"Gravity of Light," organized by Stockholm's Färgfabriken Kunsthall, debuted in a disused paint factory there in 2005. Three years later it occupied a derelict Victoria paint factory in Pittsburgh under the auspices of Woodlawn Galleries.

The warehouse-like settings were the backdrop for the metal-sized photographs illuminated by a few rows of metal sculptures with a blinding carbon arc light. St. John's, in my middle finger.

Cincinnati is Gravity's third showing, and perhaps its most important.

Here the Holy Cross Church architecture becomes an active element of the exhibition, which is part of Fotofokus, the region-wide celebration of photography.

In December 2010 James Crump, organizer of the exhibition and chief curator of the Cincinnati Art Museum as well as co-chair of Fotofokus, showed the church to the Starns. "From the very moment Doug and Mike entered the property, they were captivated by the architecture and the potential that it held for this site-specific installation," said Crump.

The innermost space of the once sacred space is in fact left jewel that is the heart. The room with the carbon arc lamp dominates the light. Blackened after first electric light invented by Thomas Edison in 1874, it almost blinds you.

When you enter the church, you are they are seen to change an entire color and a new color appears. The carbon-arc lamp produces a "ultraviolet rays all about 45,000 watts," It has a 10,000 degrees, fire the melting point of steel, and is so bright that the ever-present "keeper of the flame" - an attendant charged with replacing the carbon rod as they burn out - must wear "StP 50 screens.

Gravity of light is not a "drive-by" exhibit. You can't just cruise in and out in 10 minutes.

First, you must really look at the photographs, appropriately the medium that records light.

In the "Attract to Light" series, light is destructive, luminous,
But light also gives life. Through photosynthesis, the energy of the sun is transformed into food for plants. Yet in the simply beautiful Black Forest village, the villages have been cut by streams that run against the sun's background. They have decayed leaves from a tree's network of veins.

Those leaves might be a network in "Silhouetted against the sky, the branches match out to snap the sky any. But they also look like a network of veins.

Another network is seen in "Take Off Your Skin. I Ain't No Sin.," the largest photo in the installation – by 40 feet. Here the skin has been "stuffed away" from a realistic 19th-century model of a human head to expose the circulatory system.

A network of vascula covers the face and could be interpreted as thorns to sugared Christ. And the prominent X crossing the face is the Greek letter chi, which symbolizes Christ. This interpretation is reinforced by the photograph's location, hanging like a curtain in front of the altar.

A photograph of the portrait sculpture of Ganja (608-703) faces it from the high altar. The blind Buddhist monk attained enlightenment by looking within. His eyes are closed in meditation, while the gray head and body create a sense of serenity. This serene image contrasts with the turbulent skull in front of the charnel.

After taking in each of the w-all-sized photographs, climb the spiral stair to the choir loft. From here you get a real sense of the scale of the installation, which seems much larger than when you're on the floor.

If you turn your back to the altar, you cast a sharp shadow on Ganja, quite literally making the installation the "immersive experience" promised.