So to Speak | Joe Blundo commentary: Explorer inspires creative project
Robert Ladislas Derr has filmed himself breaking a wall with his head and doing handstands naked against a tree, so what he was doing Downtown last week wasn’t particularly unusual.

But he did get a few stares and double takes as he walked along, slowly and deliberately, wearing a yoke holding cameras pointing in four directions. He looked like a pedestrian version of the Google street-mapping van.

I was following Derr and explained to some of the inquisitive that they were looking at an art project. They seemed satisfied with the explanation, as if they’ve come to understand that, if there’s something they don’t understand, it might be art.

Derr is an Ohio State University associate professor of art whose latest project, *Discovering Columbus*, involves visiting 10 cities named for Christopher Columbus.

In each city, he does his camera walk, following a carefully plotted route determined by the constellation that corresponds to the date of the city’s founding (Aquarius in the case of Columbus, Ohio). He calls this capturing the life flow.

He also films himself kicking a globe in a pattern that correlates to the constellation.

As a final element, he invites people to sing the early 1950s pop tune *Christopher Columbus*.

(If you think you have the voice for it, reach him at discoveringcolumbus@gmail.com.)
The outcome of all this? A “chimerical landscape” of video and audio that he hopes to exhibit next year.

“I’m going to blur all the cities together, so it’s going to be really kind of an abstract notion of Columbus, from the rural to the urban.”

Besides our town, Derr has strapped on his cameras this summer in Colombuses in Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina and Wisconsin. Still on his itinerary are Columbia, Md.; Columbiana, Ohio; and the District of Columbia.

(For a city to qualify, its name has to have been directly inspired by the explorer. For example, Columbus, Neb., didn’t make the cut, because it was named for Columbus, Ohio.)

Derr, a Cincinnati native, knows how to talk serious art jargon. He explains that his seven-minute video of breaking through a wall with his head “echoes the process of birth and challenges the notions of illusionistic space.” But, sure, he knows that some people might just find it amusing.

“There’s a seriousness, but there’s a ridiculousness and a humor.”

His strolls through towns while wearing the camera contraption have also yielded art lingo and laughs. Before the Columbus project, he created *Chance*, in which he filmed himself walking through various cities in directions determined by the roll of dice. He did this while wearing a mirrored suit because he likes the “oscillating, dualistic character of mirrors.”

“Unfortunately,” he told a Colorado newspaper, “after the sun came out, I began to look like a walking disco ball.”

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