

Tubular Visions and Questions

CONTEMPORARY ARTS FORUM GROUP EXHIBIT USES VIDEO ART IN INTRIGUING WAYS

By Josef Woodard,
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'Things that Turn Your Brain to Mush'

When: through June 16

Where: Contemporary Arts Forum,
653 Paseo Nuevo

Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues.-Sat.,
noon-5 p.m. Sun.

Information: 966-5373, sbcaf.org



'visitor,' Katy McCarthy

Wayne McCall photos

Mixed messages bubble up into a fascinating froth in the current Contemporary Arts Forum exhibition with the coy title "Things that Turn Your Brain to Mush."

That cheeky, winky ironic title gets us wondering at the outset, and guest curator Warren Schultheis ups the ante of inquiry about life in the age of screens.

Is the nature of the show to celebrate video art and art about technology, or to satirize and eviscerate it, or both? Is the seemingly neurotically obsessive lure of screens in the 2010s something to bemoan or embrace? With this show, we're not sure about the general outlook, at the end of the art appreciative day, but the going is plainly entertaining and provocative.

In one of CAF's more spacious art installations of late, the show brings together examples of dryly witted video art examples and cases of art in which technology and digital means gets roundly goosed. Somehow, it all works, as a piece and as a humble compendium of perspectives.

Interestingly, the duality of perspectives sometimes comes through the forum of single



'HYPNO-TROPE,' David Cooley and Russ Carter

artist, such as Katy McCarthy, whose two pieces in seem to counteract each other (or do they complement each other?). Her piece "Visitor," something of a static welcome mat to the show, is a large, faux cheerful illuminated sign such as you might find at a gas station/mini-casino on the outskirts of Vegas. "You are the most unique visitor," it reads, with pixilated icons in the pictorial mix. By contrast, and revealing perhaps the artist's purer intent, across the room, Ms. McCarthy's "running off" involves a video art piece on a jumbo screen with a runner coming in and out of focus on a foggy beach.

Between those pieces, Tellef Tellefson's eight small screens, adding up to the work called "This Time Deeper," addresses slices of cultural life with video loops, with texts, filched imagery (including a Marx Brothers send-up of the MGM logo reel), and a candle mixed with a waterfall and psychedelic surfer loop. Similarly, Johnny Troyna's sly, cool "A movement without all the movement" entails circular makeshift screens protruding from the walls, a variation on the conventional flat screened proscenium wallspace as screen, with coarse imagery of a skateboarder

in circular motion and a spiral of a surfer in action, along with a target design overlay.

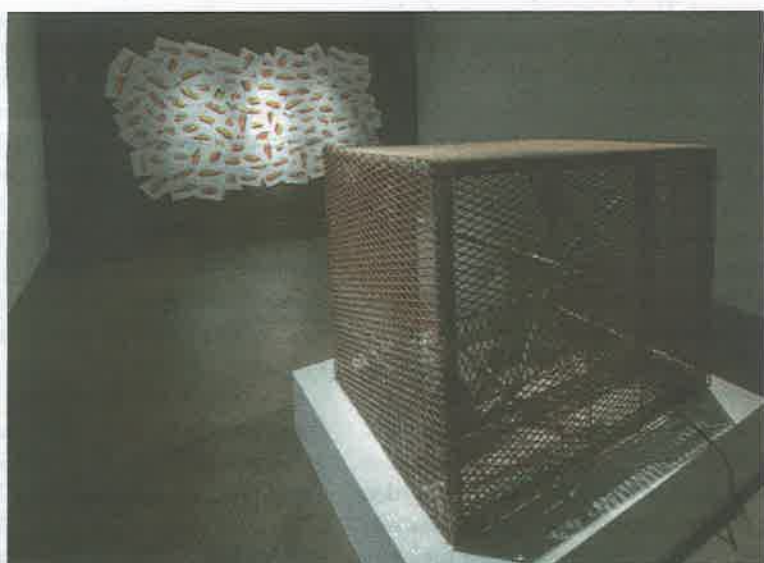
Amidst the video elements in the gallery, there is something of a pleasant sensory shock in encountering Chris Silva's "Something from Nothing," in which physicality and palpable sensation are abuzz in the enclosed small gallery space it occupies. A large fan in a rusty cage of an enclosure seems like a surreal surrogate for a "projector," a machine which projects wind towards a mash-up of color prints of pixilated car imagery — as if cloned and wind-blown, up against the wall.

Also in the realm of the physical, a piece called "HYRNO-TROPE," by David Cooley, with Russ Carter, is a large black disc with a handle which turns to produce a selective peek-a-boo kaleidoscope effect. The audience-activated sensation is charming, especially in this context.

Petra Cortright's untitled digital painting is a deconstructed and fantastical landscape image, or gardenscape, generally twice (or more) removed from the nature's way. Her clever and slightly chilling piece "System_landscapae_1-41" mixes the crude technology of animated GIFs with an existential message.

In the back gallery, Yoon Chung Han has something of the last, or peripheral, word in the show, with her paradoxical and two-part piece dubbed "Tree Rings." Again, this techno art rubs against the nature of the very mediumistic beast it purports to enable. On one end of the room, we find the designs of tree rings, the circular and almost seismographic-looking evidence of age and years experienced, in perfectly natural terms. Across the room, those still, calm works resonate with projected videos of similar visuals, linked with "found sound" loops captured at spots around Santa Barbara and New York City. We suddenly become aware of the link between the appearance of tree rings and documentation of sound waves, those "real time" tracteries of experience.

In this art, the concept has to do with the accretion of life experiences, time's passage and the metaphor of tree rings. Nature meets life in the screen age, with intriguing art in the offing.



'Something from Nothing,' Chris Silva