



Pat Lay's collage, an inkjet printing on Japanese kozo paper with gold paint and Tyvek backing.

CAW



Alicia Eggert and Alexander Reben's "Pulse Machine," with klick drum, solenoid, flip digit numerals and Arduino microcontroller.

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'Intelligent Objects' ahead

Tamagotchi, Roomba ... traditional visual art meets digital

By Joe Amarante, jamarante@nhregister.com; @Joeammo on Twitter

NEW HAVEN » Here's an idea, based on a new art exhibit: Attach a sensor to a Roomba robotic vacuum as it cleans a room and have it beam back a pattern that's depicted on a huge screen in bold colors.

OK, we might need some help with the technology (or the logic), but the result would fit in with the new exhibit "Intelligent Objects: Empathetic and Smart Art," which is Creative Arts Workshop's national juried show for 2015 that explores artworks at the intersection of analog and digital media.

The show's juror is George Fifield, director of Boston Cyberarts, a nonprofit that includes a space on Green Street in Boston that is the only gallery devoted to new media in New England.

Daniel Fitzmaurice, executive director of the Creative Arts Workshop, said it's a potential growth area for local artists.

"Creative Arts Workshop is not currently expressing a lot of the mediums being explored in this show," he said. "However, the whole idea of this show is to really explore that boundary between more traditional visual art forms and more digital art forms."

One of Fifield's areas of expertise, said Fitzmaurice, is "how do we connect traditional artists with digital artists, and vice versa. What happens when you allow a sculptor to use a 3-D printer?"

Fitzmaurice called Fifield "the foremost expert as far as this type of work is concerned."

In a phone interview the other day, Fifield traced his journey to that status.



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George Fifield

IF YOU GO

Exhibit: "Intelligent Objects: Empathetic and Smart Art"

When: Soft opening now; runs June 12-July 17

Where: Creative Arts Workshop, 80 Audubon St., New Haven

Info: 203-562-4927, creativeartsworkshop.org

Etc.: George Fifield will do a talk at opening reception, around 6 p.m. June 12

"I was an art person, at one point a graphic designer just at the moment when the digital revolution swept through," Fifield said. "As I started to become more and more of a curator, that story — the use of technology in the arts — became more and more interesting to me."

Fifield said he went from video curation to new media curation, his first exhibition coming in 1983 of computer installation art (on-screen, interactive objects and musical elements).

He came to New Haven Memorial Day week to jury the show, which consists now of 30 works by 22 artists.

"Surprisingly, there are quite a few traditional mediums in this show," Fifield said. "It was a very interesting show to jury ... because I purposely made the 'call' (inviting art submissions) somewhat enigmatic."

He said there's an Alexander Churchill painting and a Nancy Bardach quilt that resemble "that beautiful color thing you had when you defragged

CAW

FROM PAGE 1

your computer.”

Fifield said, “I wasn’t just looking for things that used technology; I was looking for things that addressed technology. It’s a little broader than I usually do. ... This was about art in the service of technology.”

In his TEDx Boston talk on “Urban Screens,” Fifield includes the LED video marquee in front of the Boston Convention Center, with its 2.8 million LED lights. It’s an informational sign but there’s an art component to it, also, designed to display some amazing digital art (a man falling into a water, etc.). There are digital walls across the world now serving as powerful examples of digital art and information display (aka data visualization).

It’s the future of not only architecture, he said, but interior design and fashion (we’ll soon “... decide what piece of media to download to our T-shirt every day.”)

That personal display isn’t here today though, right?

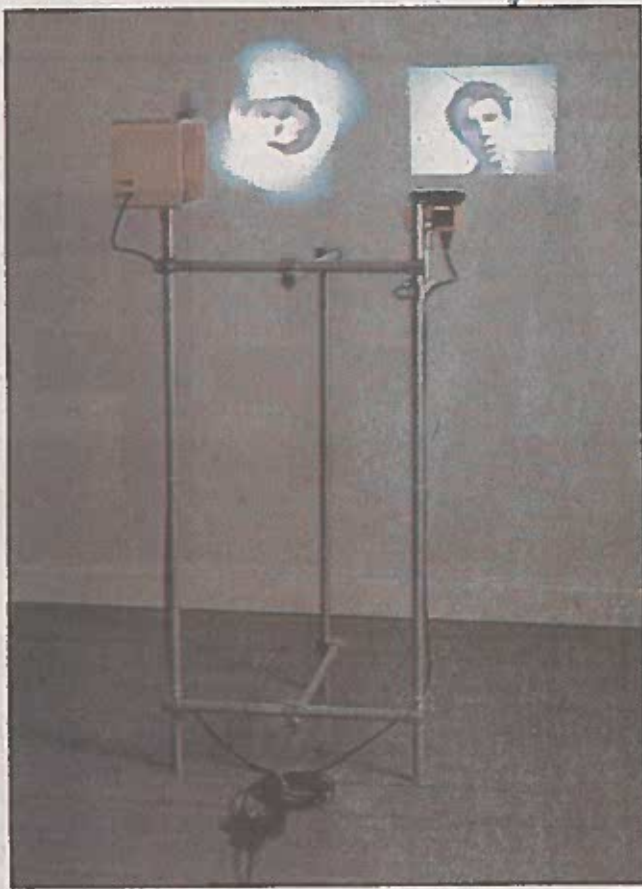
“Oh, it’s happening; it’s very interesting to watch,” he said.

In the call for such artwork, CAW and Fifield cited the Useless Machine, invented in 1952 by Marvin Minsky while at Bell Labs. When turned on, this machine had only one function: to turn itself off. It paralleled the work of Jean Tinguely (known for his sculptural machines) and had its artistic antecedents in Marcel Duchamp’s “Large Glass,” he said.

“I wanted art that made you think about intelligence. It didn’t have to be intelligent; it just had to make you think about intelligence.”

Any kind of intelligence, he said, even static imagery represented by simple code.

“And also, art that made you think about your empathetic response to things.



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Robln Mandel's "Hold #1," mixed media with two-channel video projection loop.

There’s this great debate going on these days about how much of our empathy do we give to artificial objects and how much can we afford to give?”

The old example is Tamagotchi pets, the handheld gizmo from 1996 that required care to keep its simplistic creatures “alive.”

“People name their Roombas,” he said, “This whole idea of ... we’re given these artificial creatures, and then we almost treat them as if they’re living or pets or friends or something. They’re even building robots for that purpose, to take care of the elderly, to be a friend.”

CAW, on Audubon Street in the Elm City, is a nonprofit regional center for education in the visual arts that has served the area since the 1960s.

“Right now, for Creative Arts Workshop,” said Fitzmaurice, “the show is significant because it will (give) our current students a little taste for what’s in

our future if we’re able to embrace new media and digital media ...”

Fitzmaurice said only a couple of artists from CAW submitted to the show and had pieces selected, which would have been a much higher number if the medium was simply painting. That’s OK; he said CAW officials want “our students to be exposed to work from around the world as well as to put their work on display.”

The show officially opens June 12 but it’s in a “soft opening” now.

Two winners of the CAW show, not announced yet, will receive solo shows next year at CAW’s Susan B. Hilles Gallery and/or the smaller Creative Works space.

Fifield, who also gave advice on how to display the pieces at CAW, will soon be curating a show called “+/-” at the Joseloff Gallery at the University of Hartford’s art school that will be more strictly technology based.