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D.C. area galleries: 'What's Up,' 'Common Ground,' 'Portico,' 'Energy of the Wire'

Plugged-in people needn't leave their homes — or even put down their phones — to see high-tech art. So, of course, much of the work in "What's Up: New Technologies in Art" expands on widely available computer processes. But the Mansion at Strathmore exhibition pulls cyber imaging off the screen and makes it palpable — or seemingly palpable — in fascinating ways.

Chris Bathgate designs and builds shining metal machines that suggest robots, rockets and turbines. There's some blue and black in the Baltimore artist's palette, but more often he uses silver, gold, copper and red — "Iron Man" colors. If these nonfunctional mechanisms don't take humanoid form, their sleekness does suggest a potential for self-propulsion.

Less concrete but no less assured, Scott Draves's "Electric Sheep" takes off-the-shelf software to the outer limits. Derived from an open-source screensaver, the piece has grown to involve 450,000 computers, whose collective power allows endless variations of twirling abstractions. Projected on multiple screens in a darkened gallery, the "sheep" gambol through an infinite unreality.

While Draves's project expands endlessly, R. Luke Dubois has a flair for compression. Best known as an experimental musician, Dubois assembled "Timelapse," a "spectral average" of every Billboard No. 1 hit from 1958 to 2000, 857 songs in all. At Strathmore, he's showing "The Kiss," a collage of 50 well-known cinematic make-out scenes that reduces the figures to points and lines. In the tradition of "Timelapse," the piece also compacts the movie's scores into a whooshing soundscape.

Some of the other concepts are less technological. Bryan Sullivan makes sculptures by encasing people in clear tape and then extracting the models while retaining their forms; Joseph Corcoran works elegantly in blown glass, a venerable craft that he updates with pulsing neon. And one piece, George Terry's homage to the late Washington laser artist Rockne Krebs, was not in operation when I visited. Glitches are inevitable with tech art, but most of "What's Up" works fine, conceptually as well as actually.