

Digital mirrors give new edge to interactive art

Six little kids walk into a darkened gallery at the Chrysler Museum of Art, lured across the shadowy space by a wall-sized screen filled with thousands of moving white dots.

One by one they stop and gaze up at the mysterious sight, their faces turning quizzical as they try to suss out what looks like a giant video of falling snowflakes.

Then, without warning, six small faces emerge from this enigmatic swirl — each one looking a little surprised as a hidden video camera captures them in an unexpected moment of reflection. Open mouths and wide eyes turn into smiles as each child puzzles out, then recognizes his or her increasingly distinct likeness.

More smiles and even laughter follows as these pint-sized art lovers begin to wiggle and jump in front of the screen — setting off a ticklish cartoon in which their images seem to disappear in a cloud of snow, then pop back into view. Soon they're running back and forth in front of the screen, then stopping in their tracks over and over again to watch as 100,000 points of light recombine to create a new kind of portrait.

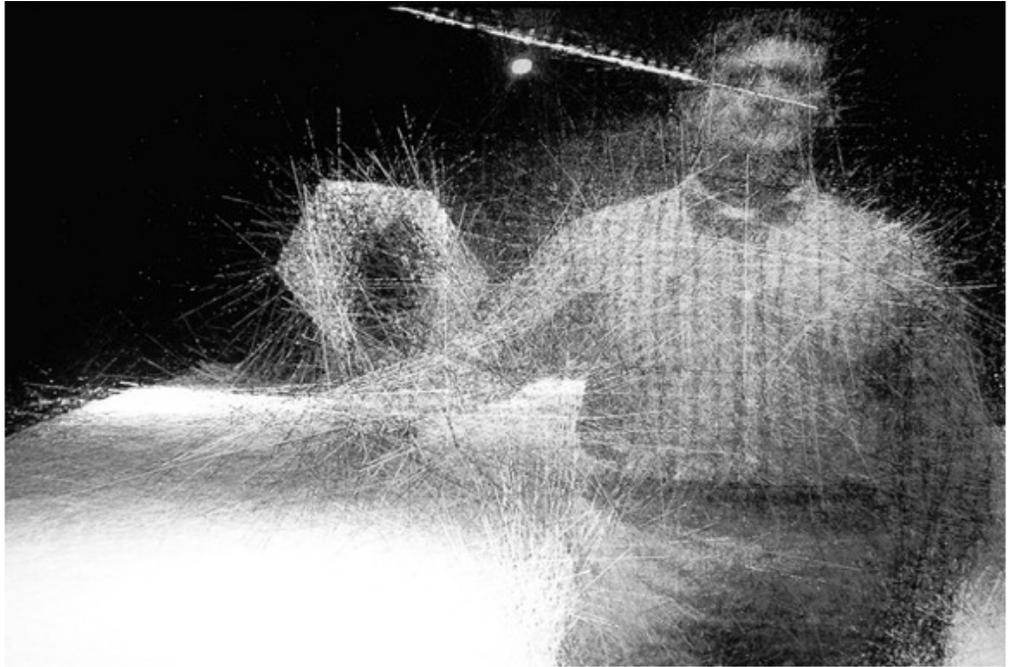
"They're not the only ones that seem to love this exhibit," says Chrysler Director William J. Hennessey, who brought this interactive digital work by New York artist Daniel Rozin to the museum.

"More and more artists are using technology today, and that's creating a whole new audience."

Fabricated with video cameras, computers, monitors and software programs, the trio of electronic works that makes up most of "Contrast: Interactive Work by Daniel Rozin" may seem a bit heady and avant garde.



Mirror #10 (Sketch Mirror) 2009 (Adrin Snider / November 30, 2010)



Darwinian Straw Mirror, 2010 is one of the works on view in Contrast: Interactive Work by Daniel Rozin on display at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk. (Adrin Snider, Daily Press / December 3, 2010)

Two other electromechanical pieces that fill the darkened galleries with the whirring sound of rotating servomotors and clacking, moving vanes feel equally out of place among the Chrysler's priceless marble sculptures and oil paintings. But despite this strangeness, the mirrorlike qualities that tie all five of Rozin's arresting creations together are defiantly old school.

Each one is a portrait, in fact, and they're designed to capture and then reflect our figures and sometimes our faces in the same way as any traditional likeness.

Where they differ is in their unconventional means of portrayal, plus the even more extraordinary fact that in each case here, the sitter — thanks to Rozin's ingeniously interactive software — can also take on the role of the artist.

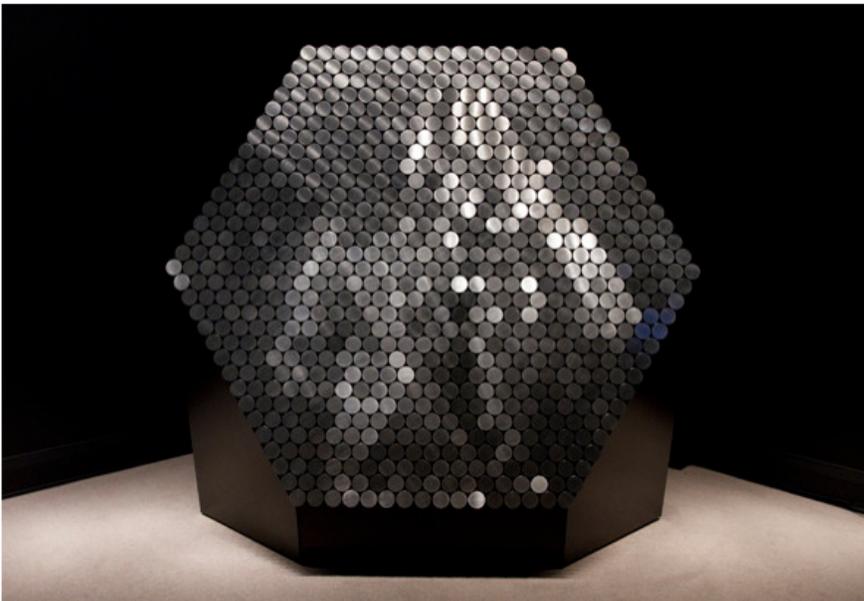


Snow Mirror, 2006

In his giant “Snow Mirror,” for example, a computer captures the viewer’s likeness with a video camera, then reconstitutes the image through 100,000 points of light that float sideways and down across a translucent silk screen. Every split-second it updates its work, constantly assessing how well each point contributes to the job of mimicking the visual information gathered by the camera.

Move enough to disrupt that portrait’s accuracy, however, and your image momentarily disappears — prompting the computer to rebuild your likeness in its new position.

“What you get is a kind of dialogue,” Hennessey says. “The piece is not just reacting. It’s actually training you so that — if you stand still — it will perfect your image.”

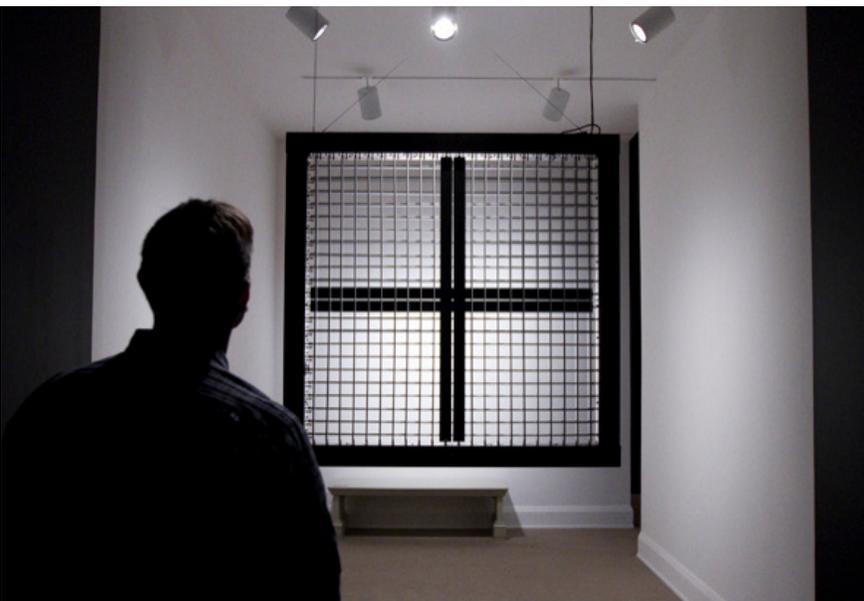


Brushed Steel Mirror, 2010

Exactly what kinds of portraits result depends upon the various units of depiction Rozin chooses for each program.

In “Snow Mirror,” his brush strokes are small points of white, grainy light, resulting in semi-solid figures that seem to be made of snow or sand. But in “Mirror No. 10 (Sketch Mirror),” he uses short, curved, drawinglike passages of colored light, resulting in images that look like they were produced by a lightning-fast sketch artist.

Still, this is a talent with a mind of its own and — rather than slavishly reproducing each likeness — it analyzes your clothing and figure for what Rozin describes as the most “interesting” and distinctive details. What results is a moving, shifting portrait that may barely describe your face but gives extra attention to ties, belts and brightly patterned clothing.



X by Y

(Adrin Snider / November 30, 2010)

Partly recognizable and partly not, in fact, each of Rozin’s portraits makes you look at yourself in ways you may have never expected. His reflection-bending works also may prompt some serious thoughts about the nature of the self and the seat of existence.

That’s because seeing your physical form emerge from nothing, shift, change and disappear — only to materialize again in some partly familiar yet also unknown form — is a provocative sight for the philosopher in all of us.

Even when we seem to be having fun.