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## PULSE's Daniel Rozin: Man Behind the Mirrors

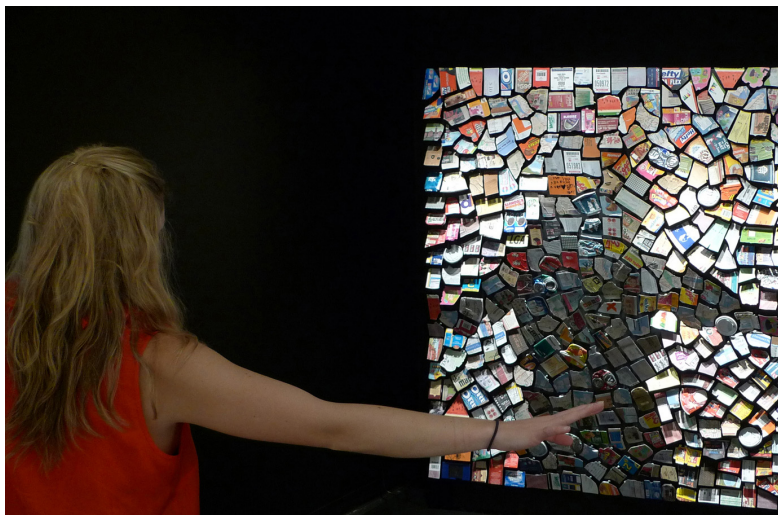
Festival artist is a pioneer in the field of interactive art

By Kayla Goggin

IT'S FOUR in the afternoon on a Wednesday and I'm watching my silhouette wave back at me from inside a wall of whirring, moving trash.

Smashed coffee cups and torn subway maps flit backwards and forwards as they create the pixel image of my hand moving back and forth. "How do you think art is driving change in the world of technology?" I'm asking Daniel Rozin, the artist behind the piece known as Trash Mirror No. 3. "It's taking over," he says.

He's joking, of course, but he just as easily might not be.



Trash Mirror No. 3 and another of Rozin's mechanical mirrors, Pom Pom Mirror, appear in I'll Be Your Mirror: Interactive Reflections as part of Telfair Museums' PULSE Art + Technology Festival at the Jepson Center for the Arts. As the festival's featured artist, Rozin will also give a lecture on Friday, January 29 at 6pm.

Rozin isn't just a veteran in the field of interactive art, he's a pioneer.

Currently the Resident Artist and an Associate Art Professor at ITP (the Interactive Telecommunications Program) at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, he's been working on his mechanical mirrors (among other projects) for almost two decades. His innovations even won him a Chrysler Design Award in 2001; past recipients have included Frank Gehry and Steve Jobs. (Yeah, that Steve Jobs.)

Over the last ten years, ITP has served as a source of inspiration for Harry DeLorme, Telfair Museums' Senior Curator of Education, as he seeks out artists for each year's festival. This time, he says he was specifically looking for work that dealt with and responded to the image of its viewer.

“Long before the selfie era, you had new media artists who were capturing and playing with the viewer’s image,” he explains. “[At this year’s festival] there’s a variety of approaches to involving the viewer, implicating the viewer, collaborating with the viewer... I chose pieces that I thought brought a diversity of approaches to that.”

Rozin was an obvious choice.

His first mechanical mirror, Wooden Mirror, was built in 1999. An octagonal grid of smooth, warm-toned wood squares, the “mirror” didn’t necessarily reflect – it used a video camera and computers to shift its tiles and replicate the appearance of viewers in front of it. Though it was Rozin’s first fully-realized mirror piece, it wasn’t the first he envisioned. That honor belongs to Trash Mirror.

At the time, there were several complications with bringing Trash Mirror to life. Looking back, Rozin says it “seemed like too much of a risk”, referring to the huge time investment (it took him over a year just to complete the much more straight-forward Wooden Mirror) and financial commitment (the piece would require hundreds of motors). His dedication to crafting every element of the work himself, though, has never been up for discussion.

“I do everything for my pieces by myself,” he tells me. “I program them, I design them – no one else has ever touched one of my pieces. I don’t have interns, I don’t have assistants. I want to make art, I don’t want to produce art.”

Shirking the modern definitional constraints surrounding the term “artist”, Rozin states (not without pride) that he’s turned himself into a “hybrid person”: part programmer, part engineer, all artist.

It shouldn’t be shocking – and that’s his point – but we both know that such drive and clarity of vision is rare. That’s why he’s exhibiting alongside contemporary masters like Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and so many other artists, well, aren’t.

Standing in front of Trash Mirror No. 3’s five hundred pieces of individually collected garbage is the equivalent of taking a selfie through the eyes of an android.

A discreetly installed Microsoft Kinect tracks your movements and feeds them through the artwork’s programming, delicately tilting tiles of trash up and down in relation to a fixed light source until you’re looking at your own silhouette. All of this happens in less than an instant, allowing the piece to capture your movements with barely a second’s delay.



Pom Pom Mirror hangs adjacent; silhouettes bloom in black against its white foreground as people stand in front of it, waving, gesturing, blowing kisses. Take a look at its sides – the piece’s motors are visible, hundreds of them, warmly buzzing as they push and pull wispy pom poms to create and hold an image of you.

“When you stand in front of this, you are the artist of the piece as much I am the artist,” Rozin says while I swing my arm in an arc above my head, watching its image swirl into pom pom existence. “Who created this moment in time? Both of us, right?”

Computers and our ever-expanding technological resources are convenient tools with which we can make interactive art – but that doesn’t mean interactive art is new. Rozin points to the cave paintings at Lascaux as an early example: an unknown ancient blowing paint around his hand to leave an impression of himself on a cave wall. Interactive art is simply qualified: it must take its meaning from the gesture without which it wouldn’t exist.

The PULSE Festival stands apart from the traditional museum schedule because of its focus on digital art as an avenue towards interactivity. But what if we stopped conceptualizing the two as mutually exclusive?

As technology expands, so will our understanding of its role in our lives. As Rozin says, “The phone you make art on is the same phone you’re trading stocks with.” If we want to see more digital art, we have to stop calling it “digital art”, we have to stop thinking of it as existing in its own art ghetto and acknowledge its place in the mainstream.

As PULSE celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, think about your image as perceived by the machines in I’ll Be Your Mirror. Who created that moment in time? Both of you, right?