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## 01SJ Lends High-tech San Jose an Artsy Air

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San Jose has struggled with the question of how to put itself on its region's cultural map for years. Its best answer so far: 01SJ: A Global Festival of Art on the Edge, a citywide biennial whose second edition opened to a large, excited audience of locals and out-of-towners Wednesday evening.

The 01SJ festival attempts to entwine Silicon Valley's high-tech sophistication with a conceptual and experiential sophistication peculiar to contemporary art. Its unevenness reflects the struggles of artists to exploit or reckon with technological magic and the dilemmas of curators pressed to decide what counts as exemplary.

The festival has several tiers of events. The first, a series of outdoor installations and performances, continues only through Sunday. Two related exhibitions at the San Jose Museum of Art run for months: "Superlight" - the project of festival organizer Steve Dietz - and "Robots," put together by SJMA's JoAnne Northrup.

Australian artist Craig Walsh provided the moment of high spectacle on opening night and will repeat it, after sunset, each evening through Sunday.

He lined the windows around the squat rotunda of San Jose City Hall with projected digital images of monstrous, slowly growing "vines." These synthetic succulents go through kaleidoscopic changes in color as they gradually swell to huge proportions. Looking now like objects of pure fantasy, now like some invasive species running amok, the vines leave the Richard Meier architecture of City Hall looking like Jules Verne's aquarium.

The wobble between the sinister and the marvelous in Walsh's piece recurs throughout "Superlight" and "Robots."

In "Robots," Chico MacMurtrie presents a video in which a 1965 Citroen almost balletically transforms itself into a towering totem pole of machinery and steel skin. A different kind of ingenuity informs Amy Hicks' video that treats three novels - "I, Robot," "The Stepford Wives" and "Frankenstein" - like flip books, patching into them passages of the Hollywood movies derived from them.

In "Superlight," Marina Zurkow has integrated, on multiple screens, surveillance footage of the San Jose Civic Center and the Guadalupe River, creating smoothly convincing reports of a flood not occurring in reality, yet. Also part of "Superlight," Boston artist Jane Marsching's "Rising North" has rectangles of projected color, with a little counter at the lower right, to dramatize temperature changes at the North Pole in the current year and 75 years or so in the future. Color field abstraction never looked so scary.

Mechanized, even digitized, art often suffers from looking too automatic, both in its operation and its associations. Rubén Ortiz Torres upset this expectation Wednesday evening with a performance of his "High 'n' Low Rider" (2008). A scissor lift with platform that acts like a whirligig, it evokes Latino lowrider car culture and the ceiling-high tinkering of exhibition preparators.

Will 01SJ and its aftermath transform outsiders' picture of San Jose or the city's thinking about itself? Not in the short run. But the festival's level of ambition and biennial rhythm have already set up a pulse. No telling what life it may yet support.