



Tech Times

Shows at Quilts & Textiles and San Jose Museum of Art whet the appetite for 01SJ Global Festival of Art on the Edge in June

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THE FERTILE nexus between art and technology informs the second coming of the biennial 01SJ Global Festival of Art on the Edge. The five-day event blitzes downtown San Jose June 4–8 with a bounty of performances, mobile art happenings, installations and wired-communities projects. The details will be dissected in detail next week, but in the meantime, several shows at participating venues allow for advance glimpses at 01SJ's breadth of vision.

In conjunction with the festival, the San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles looks at how advances in weaving technology have expanded the reach of today's fiber artists. Gloria Hansen creates complex geometric designs in PhotoShop and then prints them with Ultrachrome pigment on paper-backed silk or cotton. Her wild palette of psychedelic colors exists in tension with interlocking patterns of squares, diamonds, circles and ovals. Perspectives II, with its four segments of receding squares in bright hues, vibrates with the visual flux of Victor Vasarely's Op Art canvases.

The artists of the '60s and '70s get updates in the work of Lisa Lee Peterson. Using the advanced computer-controlled Jacquard loom, Peterson fashions a Barbara Kruger-like koan—"And Get Your Teeth Into Art"—in white sans-serif letters on red rectangles; the message separates a portrait of the smiling artist from the most famous smiler in art history: the Mona Lisa. In an homage to Roy Lichtenstein, Peterson converts the Pop Art master's comic-book Benday Dots into a woven panel in which a dour Chairman Mao chides the Chinese-American artist to stop dabbling in art and "choose a sound, serious vocation."

Cathy Bolding, who was a student of mathematics at MIT, makes the jump from digital photographs to large woven hangings with a CAD program and a computerized handloom. Her botanical explorations zoom in on the overlapping spears of an agave plants, the twisted frond ends of a blue agave and the red fruit of a prickly pear. Sparkly threads glisten amid the spines, catching the eye.

Jumping back more than a century, the museum also displays some prime examples of American quilts to illustrate how the basic visual unit of the computer—the pixel—was anticipated in the quilter's accumulation of small patches. In a large landscape done by an unknown artist circa 1890 in the "postage stamp style," thousands of small square patches add up to a vista of a farm house rising behind a stone wall—you can't really "read" it as a landscape until you stand far enough away for the squares to merge into a coherent image.

The San Jose Museum of Art assembled a robot army in its upstairs gallery for 01SJ. Downstairs, the "Superlight" show, curated by the festival's artistic director, Steve Dietz, shows off the works of a global phalanx of artists who harness technology (both new and deliberately retro) to make points about the environment and society.

Befitting the nature of the festival, many of the works feature interactivity—between art and visitor, between one site and others. High-mounted video screens show snippets of Marina Zurkow's Paradoxical Sleep, which will be shown in full with more screens at the San Jose Convention Center starting May 29. Imagining a future disaster, Zurkow fuses shots of concrete hallways with rising flood waters from the nearby Guadalupe River. The humans have left, and the elements are reclaiming the city; it reminds me of J.G. Ballard's novel *The Drowned World*.

Communications politics drive Tantalum Memorial—Reconstruction, a provocative installation by the trio of Harwood, Wright and Yokokoji. Mechanical phone switching equipment helps visualize the current plight of Congo, where competition for coltan ore, which eventually turns up in cell phones, has wreaked violence and suffering. The piece registers calls made by Congolese activists, so as to give a sense of people fighting back—although a troubling touch of surveillance technology nags at the viewer.

Paul DeMarinis deploys even older technology—classic metronomes in wooden cases—and sets them to clicking in rhythm to the recorded sounds of hypnotists. There is a suggestion here that technology itself can have a lulling effect, putting us into a trance with its promises.

The best pieces break the human/object dynamic of the usual museum display mode. Love Disorder, by Bruce Charlesworth with Colleen Ludwig, occupies a whole room, polished wainscoting below, flat-red walls above. At the far end of the room, a giant screen projects in tight close-up the face of man—Big Brother from 1984 jumps to mind. As you walk around in the room, sensors track your proximity to the talking head, which alternately cajoles, entices and then scolds you with a litany of phrases designed to induce emotional vertigo.

The artists at “Superlight” should whip up interest in the festival itself, which starts on June 4 with opening ceremonies starting at 7:30pm in the Circle of Palms outside the museum. The festivities will include a customized scissors-lift by Ruben Ortiz-Torres going through its paces, an address by Luis Valdez and presentations by Global Youth Voices and We-C. Afterward, the action moves to the City Hall Rotunda, which will be lit up inside with the dancing video projections of Craig Walsh. San Jose’s own eclectic folk rockers the Mumlers will perform.