

A&E

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: FILMS, TELEVISION, STAGE, DANCE, BOOKS, MUSIC

THINGS TO DO

FOR FAMILY

In the mood for a little baby talk? The guides and zoo keepers at the Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium are on hand today for the fifth annual Baby Day event. They'll talk about the baby elephants, orangutans, gorillas and colobus monkeys from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Also scheduled is face painting, a scavenger hunt, a salute to Disney and more (for your babies, not theirs). Information: 412-665-3640.

IN MUSIC

The Arts Festival wraps up all that jazz with ... well, a jazz concert. Sax man Boney James performs at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow on the festival stage in Point State Park. Bandmates include David Torkanowsky, Rohn Lawrence, Larry Kimpel, Ricardo Jordan, Lenny Castro and Morris Pleasure. The performance is free. And hey, it looks as if you can leave the umbrella at home.

Sculptor shares his subconscious world

By Mary Thomas
Post-Gazette Art Critic

One of the more fascinating aspects of the curious and mesmerizing kinetic sculpture of Brooklyn artist Gregory Barsamian is that the motion the viewer perceives is illusory while the actual movement of his pieces goes all but unnoticed.

This is not the first observation that comes to mind upon entering the darkened Wood Street Galleries, where a pulsing strobe intensifies the surreal and theatrical quality of captivating works that appear to transmute before one's eyes. Nor should it be. Like all good magic, a certain suspension of criticality is required to fully appreciate it.

But after looking at the sculpture for a while, the question "what's going on here?" inevitably arises.

The artist accomplishes his sleight in much the same way filmmakers do, but his "frames" are three-dimensional. He sculpts series of slightly altered images that form a sequence and attaches them to a rotating frame. As the 16 or so individual units in a work pass by, they're flashed by the strobe, so that the visitor reads motion in much the way he or she would at the movies.

The soap suds from a pair of washing hands morph into paper bags as they fall before resuming opaque liquidity and dropping into the opening third eye of a head below. Other dismembered hands scroll open an eye chart in front of an anonymous central figure who's sensorially shrouded.

The exhibition, "About Time," is a collaboration between the Three Rivers Arts Festival and Wood Street, where a work by Barsamian was shown early last year.

As intriguing as his technique is, and demanding of precision, the impact of his works — which he calls "transfigurations" — comes from deeper sources than technology.

For inspiration, Barsamian says, he probes the "realms of emotion and intuition, and not necessarily calculation and reason. I draw my images from life — not from art history, not from politics — but life via the subconscious."

Barsamian cites Bell Labs research reporting that consciousness operates at the same speed as language, 15 bits per second, whereas our senses bring into our bodies information at the rate of 20 million bits per second.

"There's this whole chauvinism that's developed over consciousness," he says, making the comparison that it's "like this mile-wide river of information that we stick our finger in every now and then" and



Gregory Barsamian's "Lather" (2001) is part of an exhibit of his works at Wood Street Galleries.

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pretend to be aware of. "A further conceit," he adds, "is that we're in control."

While studying philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, the Chicago native, dismayed at the "despondent state" that seemed the logical conclusion of then-popular existentialism, found hope in Nietzsche's observation that, while mankind in general was adrift, "artists were in a unique position to create their own worlds [and] needed no justification [to do so]."

Classes in metalworking followed, but when the emphasis in those weighed too heavily toward "preciousness" and he perceived as "artificial" the effort to restrict all expression to one medium, he turned to sculpture. An aptitude for tinkering — he says he was a "suburban motorhead" when young — allows him to introduce elements of time and narrative into his works, "increasing the amount of information presented exponentially."

Barsamian's ideas are initiated by personal experience and dreams, as with "Forty," a birthday cake that morphs into Medusa and was inspired by his experience of that milestone. But he aims for "universal content," something akin to tapping the Jungian collective consciousness, which may explain why his work is as popular in Asia and Europe as it is in the United States. "I don't really like art that is too personal," he says.

Another criteria he has is that the "person looking at [the art] has some thread to hold on to." If the viewer "is clueless about what it is without a text, that, to me, is not good art," he says. "I think [the response] should come from the image, not the text, or you might as well just write it down."

Barsamian's ultimate achievement is to present timeless and complex constituents of the human persona in a way that's both illuminating and haunting and accessible to all comers.

While the festival ends tomorrow, "About Time" continues through July 26. The gallery is lo-

cated above the T at Wood Street and Liberty. Hours this weekend are noon to 8 p.m.; then 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays. Admission is free. For information: 412-471-5605.

Japanese photo show

Silver Eye Center for Photography is sponsoring a bus trip June 29 to The Cleveland Museum of Art to see "The History of Japanese Photography," a terrific exhibition that originated at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. (PG review is scheduled to run July 6.)

The bus leaves Silver Eye, on the South Side, at 9 a.m. and will return at 6 p.m. The \$70 cost, \$65 for students and members (bring a friend for an additional \$15 while seats last), includes a Bento box lunch and a tour of the show. Registration and deposit are due by Wednesday; call Sylvia Ehler at 412-431-1810.

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