Is it live, or is it ...

Wood Street Galleries
installation weird, surreal

For Real: Realism in the Digital Age
Through Dec. 31
Wood Street Galleries
601 Wood St.
(412) 471-5605
Tuesday to Wednesday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Thursday to Saturday 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

LIZ COWAN
Staff Writer

The question of existence is a traditional metaphysical problem: reality. How does one determine what is real? The first truth attained from a state of Cartesian doubt is belief in one’s own existence as a “thinking thing” — as Decartes said, “I think, therefore I am.” But the reliability of our senses is more difficult to accept. How do we know that what we see is real? Such a question becomes increasingly difficult to answer in this technological era. The latest show at Wood Street Galleries poses this question through art.

“For Real” is a world of illusions that blur the lines between truth and falsehood. The five artists making their Pittsburgh debut all utilize digital technology to challenge our grasp of reality. The series of images and films are sometimes disturbing, yet always interesting.

The sound of breathing greets you as the elevator doors open on the second floor. Immediately, you are confronted with a series of photographs entitled “Science Story,” by Australian artist Patricia Piccinini — a startling comment on advances in biotechnology and genetics. The photos feature SO2 (synthetic organism 2), a strange hairless cross between a platypus and salamander.

Piccinini’s “Breathing Room” is the headlining work in the exhibit. Its mysterious and comforting sounds are a magnetic force. Entering the work, you are confronted with three screens, displaying strange images of breathing skin. The floor vibrates beneath you. The images are at once both familiar and foreign. Suddenly, the room panics, the breathing quickens, increasing almost to a wheeze and the vibrations intensify as well. Piccinini means for the work to be a reflection on panic in our modern world.

Other images on display include selections from...
**Pinocchio (1999), by Margi Geerlinks**

Real, page 6

Dutch artist Margi Geerlinks’ series, “Crafting Humanity.” Geerlinks presents her subjects knitting items that appear to become human. Her “Pinnochio” images are particularly interesting — the child being created on a sewing machine. There are similar images, all modified just slightly, playing with reality.

The exhibit also features videos by New York artist Timothy Hutchings and Canadian artist Euan Macdonald. Macdonald’s films play with reality in an obvious manner, creating strange scenarios on film. Hutchings’ video is more discreet. The images on the screen appear quite real, but they were created using photographs of buildings destroyed during World War II. The images exist for the audience in a very real way, in fact they were once part of reality, but they no longer exist.

Californian artist Amir Zaki is also featured in the exhibit. Zaki’s photographs are probably most perplexing because they so closely resemble reality. Yet upon closer examination, the discrepancies between this manufactured reality and our own become more apparent. The photos present night scenes in the artist’s hometown of Los Angeles, and their divergence from reality renders them disorienting.

All of these contemporary works ask meaningful questions about the time we live in and challenge the way we see the world. They are intriguing, confusing and strange. The artists featured all take advantage of the digital technology available to art, yet they do so in different ways, posing different questions, eliciting different responses. The world of “For Real” is an escape from reality, a journey into the unknown.