

STYLE



HEIDI MURRIN/TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Extreme art

'Ecole d'aviation' is an installation comprised of 23 multicolored umbrellas set atop poles of different heights at the bottoms of which are attached small motor-driven accordions.

Technology inspires latest exhibits at Wood Street Galleries

BY KURT SHAW

TRIBUNE-REVIEW ART CRITIC

You don't have to be into art to appreciate the piece "Ondulation" on display at Wood Street Galleries. An installation made of water, sound and light, it takes up the entire second floor space of the downtown Pittsburgh gallery. And though those three components sound simple enough, what's amazing is how they all come together in this work of art to allow visitors to see several physical phenomena.

Basically a gigantic trough of water underneath of which loudspeakers emit a multitude of slowly fluctuating sounds and vibrations causing a variety of undulations and rippled patterns on the water's surface, it is dramatically lit by a sequence of lights that reflect the undulations onto the gallery's walls.

The end result is sound made manifest in both physical and visual forms with the added benefit of creating a meditative, almost hypnotic, environment.

Murray Horne, Wood Street's director and curator, describes it as a "combination waterfall and Japanese garden." In other words, it is a sort of contemplative space or experience, one that is so enthralling that several visitors have been compelled to sit through the entire 56-minute preprogrammed cycle of the piece.

Created by the international trio Plumbing for Beginners (Thomas McIntosh, Emmanuel Madan of Montreal and Mikko

'hi-tech/lo-tech'

When: Through May 15. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays. 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays.

Admission: Free.

Where: Wood Street Galleries, 601 Wood St., downtown Pittsburgh.

Details: 412-471-5605 or www.pgharts.org/art/woodstreet.cfm

Hynninen of Helsinki) it is on display as part of the exhibition "hi-tech/lo-tech," which is presented in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's 13-week Quebec Festival, a celebration of the visual and performing arts of Quebec.

The remaining works on view in the exhibition, which are up on the third floor, do not offer such a visceral and all-encompassing experience, but nevertheless, they are just as compelling.

For example, Montreal's Jean-Pierre Gauthier creates sound installations out of such unlikely things as motors, pumps, and objects culled from everyday life such as jars, clamps, pipes, buckets, even pie tins.

Two installations in this exhibition display how Gauthier can combine such disparate objects to create multifunctional systems that emanate sound.

In one, titled "Le grand menage," Gauthier presents an automatic machine for spring cleaning in the form of a janitor's cart full of bubbling solvents. As the

sound of gurgling bubbles fills the entrance to the gallery, where the piece is located, the bubbles themselves slowly build in mop bucket, bag and cart until overflowing, ultimately ending up on the gallery floor at day's end.

In another, "Species: Rut," Gauthier makes music of sorts out of a massive entanglement of electrical conduit pipe and wires to which he has attached various Rube Goldbergian type, motorized contraptions made out of everything from plastic ties to pony clamps.

Each of these is hooked to an amplifier, which is connected to a sound mixer. But even more ingenious, all of them are connected to motion sensors, so when one walks through Gauthier's mess, it comes alive with the varied sounds of all of those little contraptions. This makes for an experience that is something like being caught in a mound of mousetraps with all the noise, but none of the pain.

A bit more harmonious, both literally and figuratively, is "Ecole d'aviation," or "School of Aviation," by Diane Landry, of Quebec City. An installation comprised of 23 multicolored umbrellas set atop poles of different heights at the bottoms of which are attached little, motor-driven accordions, it is a transformational work that moves way beyond the multifarious units that make it up.

As the accordions slowly bellow, the umbrellas slowly open and close. But they do so intermittently, which, in a way, alludes to an individual's breathing. This

adds a sense of personification to each of the umbrella/accordion units that, when grouped together, transforms the piece into something akin to a singing chorus.

What that has to do with flight, as the piece's title infers, is lost on this reviewer, but "Ecole d'aviation" certainly takes off from the kind of overtly technology-oriented and equally techno-inspired, multimedia works that most have come to expect of Wood Street Galleries in recent years.

What's important to keep in mind about all of these works is that, although they all have some high-tech component that aids in their function — as in Landry's "Ecole d'aviation," in which each umbrella-accordion is hooked up to a controller that in turn is connected to a computer — they are all producing effects that are happening in real time, something that is a very low-tech assumption. In other words, those sounds coming from Gauthier's motion detector controlled piece are immediate, real and of the moment; those bubbles coming from his janitor cart, tactile and overflowing.

As Horne has always maintained, "Artists always push technology to an extreme. They never stand still. It's the same with video and new media artists." At least here, in this exhibition these artists have pushed their work more so into the extremes of reality. Which is what makes each piece so successful.

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