Extreme art

Technology inspires latest exhibits at Wood Street Galleries

BY KURT SHAW
THREE-EXHIBITORY ARTritic

You don't have to be hard to appreciate the piece "Occupied" 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 the three components sound simple enough, what's amazing is how they all come together in this work of art to allow visitors to experience several physical phenomena.

Basically a gigantic trough of water underneath which loudspeakers emit a multitude of slowly fluctuating sounds and vibrations creating a variety of undulations and ripples on the water's surface. It's dramatically lit by a sequence of lights that reflect the undulations onto the gallery's walls.

The end result is a sound installation that is both physical and visual, with added benefit of creating a meditative, almost hypnotic, environment.

Murray Horni, Wood Street's director and curator, describes it as a "combination of natural and Japanese gardens." In other words, it's a sort of conceptual space or experience, one that is so redefining that several visitors have been compelled to sit through the entire 50 minutes programmed cycle of the piece.

Created by the international trio Planning for Beginners (Thomas Heinze, Kimi NAMES: Montal and MikeHOOD MURDOCH/THE REVIEW

A "Ecole d'avion" is an installation comprised of 25 multicolored umbrellas set atop poles of different heights at the bottoms of which are attached motors. They are motor-driven accordions.

What has that to do with light, as the piece's title implies, is lost on the reviewer, but "Ecole d'avion" certainly takes off from the kind of overtly technology-oriented and equally tech-inspired multimedia works that have come to define 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 — an in L Lesbian's "Ecole d'avion," in which each umbrella-accordion is linked to a controller that in turn is connected to a computer — they are all extraordinary examples of high-tech materials that are happening in real time, something that is a very low-tech assumption. In other words, these sounds coming from Gauthier's motion detector controlled piece are immediate and real of the moment. Those bub- bles coming from his janitor curl, tactile and everflowing.

As Horis has already described, "artists always push technol- ogy to its extremes. 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 into the extremes of reality. Which is what makes each piece so successful.

Kurt Shaw can be reached at kurtshaw@tribunereview.com