Pittsburgh

"Interactive Domains"

Wood Street Galleries

Interactive electronic art exhibitions appear to be on the rise. As they proliferate, we as viewers must begin to rethink the definition of art and to question the idea of the visual. Undeniably, content and technology are no longer separate entities—ideas, images, forms, and techniques meld, generating a visual expression choreographed by electronic media and the multiplicity of everyday experience.

The exhibition "Interactive Domains" provided a sampling of high-technology art. Murray Horne invited Eduardo Kac, Luc Courchesne, Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv, and Claudia Hart to construct interactive installations that required viewer/user interchange. In this show, spectators could not be passive observers if they aspired to completely experience the multi-dimensional works. Sound, speech, music, images, and movement mixed and were to be experienced simulta-
At first glance one assumed that there were four distinct activities. However, after a time, it became evident that this was a single drama and that the different characters were together despite their illusionary separateness. Dialogue was invited among viewers and virtual characters through questions and statements projected onto the screen. Because of the time-based component of this work, images were layered and synthesized in a manner that parallels the fabric of contemporary life, unlike two-dimensional representations on a single plane.

In this multisensor interactive panoramic video installation, composed of computers with touch pads, microphones, motion detectors, video projectors, and four laser disc players, Courchesne harnessed technology to fabricate a poetic construct. Kac’s "Rebuilding the Building Blocks" addressed the programmable processes of genetics and biotechnology. Center-stage in the gallery was a wall projection of a petri dish containing a fictional gene that had been exposed to live bacteria. Kac electronically created it by translating a sentence from the Book of Genesis into Morse code and then transforming the code into DNA pairs. Framing the organic image, on adjacent walls, was the Morse code: the actual sentence from the Bible, and a stream of letters representing DNA molecular structure (A, T, C, G). Viewers, as well as Internet users, could view the live mutating organic material and participate in exposing the enclosing bacteria to ultraviolet light by clicking on a symbol of the dish. While this clinical work raises our consciousness surrounding genetic engineering, it is hoped that Kac will push his ideas beyond cleverness and popular science trends.

Claudia Hart’s "Playworld" was inspired by digital animation and video gaming; the viewer witnessed a projection of cartoon characters—half-man/half-pig. Brightly colored, chubby little creatures, swooned in rows, appeared to be having a jolly time clapping and giggling. At the bottom of the screen the word "press" appears. Pushing the flurry button activated the sound of a woman’s shrill cry that momentarily filled the setting. It faded quickly—nothing changed—the little piglets were oblivious. No doubt the Barkers were cute, but Hart’s portrayal of the concurrent existence of "real..."
life" comedy and tragedy is in this case a one-liner.

"Interactive Domains" demonstrated how rapidly things are changing. Is interactive entertainment a fantasy come true or a bad dream? The game is real—computers and video are the fastest-growing segment of the entertainment world, and artists are showing us what we might expect in the future.

—Elaine A. King