

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

At Wood Street show, the more you play the more the art responds



A player participates in Blast Theory's game "Can You See Me Now?" The London-based group is among several interactive media artists in Wood Street Galleries' "Replay."

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it's not much more challenging than a doodle and doesn't ask any more of its audience.

Likewise, "Dielectric," by visiting Carnegie Mellon University assistant professor Winkler, is visually striking and technologically interesting, but feels slightly flat. Inspired by the buzzing sounds that power lines produce, the artwork consists of the crossarms of two sparking power lines that branch into the shape of a hammock. The wires in the hammock are insulated so that gallery patrons can actually lie down in it. A gallery release defines dielectric as "a substance that is a poor conductor of electricity but an efficient supporter of electrostatic fields." The power lines stop buzzing when the person rests within the hammock's embrace.

"Dielectric" viewers cannot avoid interaction with the physical artwork — if you walk near it, it sparks — but it involves no mental faculty, just their presence, and for all of the complexity of the sculpture, the actual payoff is somewhat simple. When the patron is actually suspended in the hammock, the sparks stop, literally and figuratively.

While all of the artists represented in this exhibition maintain high international profiles and it's beneficial to see them featured in "Replay," perhaps the most notable part of the show is the American premiere of the London-based group Blast Theory. Somewhere between a theater group and an art collective, Blast Theory stages events that emphasize contrasts between society's digital and technological capabilities and society's real-life efforts, such as games that incorporate both real-life and online players.

Wood Street Galleries presents documentation of some of the games Blast Theory has concocted, which, though informative, grows slightly tiresome. Visitors to the gallery can view video footage from the games or they can view the group's Web site, www.blasttheory.co.uk. The group's video work, "TRUCOLD," is also on display, and features urban landscapes shot at night

ART REVIEW

"Replay"

● **WHERE:** Wood Street Galleries at 601 Wood St., above the T.

● **WHEN:** 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays through Dec. 31.

● **INFORMATION:** 412-471-5605.

that raise questions concerning isolation and reality.

"Replay" also features a work by an artist familiar to the gallery, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. He last presented work at Wood Street in March, a documentation of his lightscapes over Mexico City. From Nov. 1 to Nov. 24, visitors to the gallery could participate in his current piece, "Amodal Suspension: relational architecture 8," by sending messages online that were translated into lights that flashed over the city of Yamaguchi, Japan.

In the near future, an installation like "Amodal Suspension" would be a great piece of art to base in Pittsburgh; not only does it celebrate the union of technology and art, two aspects the region is trying to promote, but it also creates beautiful lightscapes.

Though not all of the pieces in this exhibition have a "pop" to them, they introduce internationally recognized artists in a truly informative fashion. The artwork not only attempts to explain humans' growing, complex relationship with technology, but it also attempts to challenge it through new technological developments themselves.

Leslie Hoffman is a freelance art critic for the Post-Gazette.

ART REVIEW

When visitors play, this exhibit comes to life

By Leslie Hoffman

A pen, a hammock, a swirling mass of who-knows-what, a couch. Each of these items acts as an invitation to participate in the interactive artworks in "Replay," Wood Street Galleries' current exhibition.

"Replay" consists of works by internationally acclaimed artists Masaki Fujihata, Fabian Winkler, Golan Levin and the London-based group Blast Theory. A component of an installation by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is also represented. In each case, the art relies on audience participation. If the audience doesn't interact with the pieces, it won't reap the artworks' benefits, which, in some cases, are rewarding and in others less so.

Fujihata's piece, "Beyond Pages," re-

sides in a square "house" built for the occasion. Inside sits a table, which faces a window and a video projection of a door. On the table, a light pen rests near the image of a book. Each touch of the pen to the book flips its pages, which in turn reveals such items as an apple, Japanese kanji letters, a glass of water or a door. When the pen touches the item, an animation occurs: A bite gets taken out of the apple or a small child suddenly opens and closes the door.

This interactive book seems especially fitting for times when our "desktop" no longer refers to the physical surface where we place our iBook, which isn't a book at all. In this case, a reader interacts with the book so that she is also a writer in a way; when she turns the page to the Japanese kanji characters the pen

mobilizes a stream of characters that stop only when the reader removes the pen from the surface. Colorful and accessible, "Beyond Pages" is a delight that also provides relevant parallels to the way we utilize information today and the way we will implement it in the future.

"Floccus," Levin's work, occupies a dark room. Using a pen and a special pad, viewers can control the movement of a swirling white hairball — "floccus" is Latin for hairball — on a blue background. Different areas of the screen produce different sounds. Again, if "Beyond Pages" acts as a futuristic desktop, then Levin's "Floccus" is a futuristic doodle, like a supersonic Etch-A-Sketch. But despite the soothing appeal of "Floccus,"

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By moving a pen, a visitor can activate Masaki Fujihata's "Beyond Pages," one of the new media artworks in the exhibition "Replay" at Wood Street Galleries, Downtown.