

LIVING SYSTEMS:

NEW MEDIA WORK BY

TRICIA MCLAUGHLIN AND ROBERT DRUMMOND

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The growth of digital artwork as an artistic medium is an artificial classification. Digital artwork can take on many forms--installation, film, video, animation, interactive media and virtual reality. In this sense, the term digital artwork is no more specific or informative than the terms sculpture or drawing. They all convey different possibilities and eventualities, but tell us little about intent or meaning.

In this intriguing exhibition composed of diverse media work by artists Tricia McLaughlin and Robert Drummond, the integration of digital technologies is a central element in studio practice. Different techniques and styles are utilized to construct natural and imagined environments, each work connoting aspects of living systems.

Christiane Paul stated that digital technology has revolutionized the way we produce and experience art today. Now that digital art has become an established medium and museums and galleries around the world are collecting and organizing major exhibitions of digital work, artists and galleries alike are developing new possibilities for the creation and experience of art.¹

In "*Living Systems*," McLaughlin and Drummond augment nature, social behaviors and environments by use of film,

video and animation. Expanding well outside of the box or monitor, they compose real and imagined spaces for the viewer to experience and explore new interactive possibilities.

TRICIA MCLAUGHLIN

Residing in New York City, McLaughlin is a graduate of Syracuse University and holds a Master of Fine Arts from Hunter College. In 2004 she was awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in video.

Incorporating drawings, models, and 3D video animation, McLaughlin's work relies on human beings' adherence to structure, both natural and invented. In the past, McLaughlin created animated films showing various incarnations of architectural environments and living conditions. She motorizes physical objects in sculpture to advance her exploration of better designs for living.²

The animated characters Hefty Man and Slender Woman are recurring elements in McLaughlin's work. Hefty Man and Slender Woman are common characters, representing every man and every woman and demonstrating the functions of architecture. They never speak, and they act differently in each environment depending on the task at hand. Hefty Man and Slender Woman are computer-

controlled characters who are able to exhibit autonomous behaviors and navigate around their world in a lifelike and improvisational manner. McLaughlin's oil portraits of the characters affirm them as immortalized beings.

The main element in McLaughlin's work is water. She sees the human body as a vehicle for water, stating, "Water is an element that we cannot live without. I focus on the basic needs that every individual has to deal with, and the behaviors to obtain and get rid of water are universal."³

Several of McLaughlin's works take the form of instructional videos. One example, *Home Rolled*, 2004-2005, centers on a cylindrical house divided into three compartments: a bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom. The occupant must roll the structure to gain access to each of these compartments.

Her first full-scale architectural design project from animation is *Musical Toilet/Sink Combo*, 2002. McLaughlin refers to her first design to be built on a human scale as "getting out of the monitor." Borrowing the idea from musical chairs, the egg-shaped design contains a toilet on one side and a sink on the other. Music begins to play but when it stops you must use the utility you find yourself near.

McLaughlin states that her intention is to alter obstacles that we already encounter or to imagine different living conditions in other physical realities. Exploring architectural living units and the interaction in these environments transforms not only the architecture but the social behaviors of every man and every woman.

ROBERT DRUMMOND

A live video performance and installation artist, Robert Drummond's background reflects a variety of disciplines. His work shows the experience of a lighting designer, a stage actor, a photographer, a cinematographer, a videographer, and a sound engineer. After several years of film study, a Bachelor of Arts in film production and drama in 1995 from Vassar College and a Master of Fine Arts from University of Southern California in 1999, Drummond combined these efforts into video installation.

Drummond's video installations employ various projection methods, sculptural components and landscapes. Integrating video imagery, structural forms and soundscapes, his montages are projected onto textured glass, freestanding window frames, stainless steel and mirrors. Drummond states, "The ability to create dynamic environments through the interplay of light and surface is video grafting with more traditional forms of art." Drummond believes in transcending the monitor to create a living, breathing, sculptural entity.⁴

Assembling and reconfiguring the natural environment from a compilation of image sequences he shoots as he moves through the world, Drummond gathers images not always consciously perceived. He constantly explores the relationship of image, environment, self and nature's inherent mystery.

The element of humankind is evident in his video assemblage of *Phoenix Crossing*. Completed at USC film school for his senior thesis, Drummond shot in Los Angeles and the southwest to produce a tapestry of rich imagery and sound meditations. As the title suggests, life and death recycle as contrasting images with audio: portraits of a newborn baby are juxtaposed with images of an elderly person; windmills are paired with nuclear plants. A scene depicting countless hands gripping a handrail documents contemporary life reaching the point of explosion. Departure from the narrative traditions of video guides the viewer to focus on the intricacies of each image and its context.

Emotion Anamorphic, a video installation, explores abstraction and movement through the technique of anamorphic distortion, a method used in Western European art. Intrigued by Hans Holbein's skull in the portrait *The Ambassadors*, Drummond sought to create an effect with moving video. Employing an overhead projector, a mirror and a polished stainless steel cylinder, the anamorphosized images reflect and distort faces and limbs creating a dream-like scene.

Drummond's attraction to the ebb and flow of nature enticed him to live and study for 90 days in Manitoba, Canada recording the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) with a variety of camera technologies. The resulting work, *Northern Nights*, is a combination of recorded images of bifurcations on the snow across the tundra, steam venting from chimneys, cracking ice and the night sky. Audio is a vital element as ethereal electronic music form an aural collage alongside the sound of footsteps in the snow. Together the viewer and image dissolve into a more organic universe of encompassing light beams, visceral sound, and interactive layered planes.⁴

Selected from an international pool of artists, Tricia McLaughlin and Robert Drummond are creating video installations for the new Virginia Beach Convention Center opening later this year.

Curated by Brenda LaBier.

www.triciamclaughlin.net
www.robertdrummond.com

¹ Paul, Christiane. *Digital Art*, p. 7

² *Living Pictures: The Digital World Animates Contemporary Art*, 2005, p. 8

³ *Westminster Bulletin*, 2005, *Artist Profile*, "The Realm of Fantasy"

⁴ www.GreenGalactic.com/robertdrummond.html, 2005

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